WOOD MAGIC.

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A Fable.

BY

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CHAPTER I.

THE COUNCIL.

BEFORE Bevis could ask any questions, the Squirrel went off to speak to the Rook, and to show him a good bough to perch on near the Owl's castle. He then came back and conducted Bevis to the seat in the ash-stole, where he was hidden by the honeysuckle, but could see well about him. Hardly had Bevis comfortably seated himself than the councillors began to arrive. They were all there; even the Rat did not dare stay away, lest his loyalty should be suspected, but took up his station at the foot of the pollard-tree, and the Mouse sat beside him. The Rook sat on the oak, no great way from the Squirrel; Kaue, the crow, chose a branch of ash which projected close to the pollard. So envious was he of the crown that he could not stay far from it.

Cloctaw, the jackdaw, who had flown to the council with him, upon arrival, left his side, and perched rather in the rear. Reynard, the fox, and See, the stoat, his friend, waited the approach of the king by some fern near the foot of the pollard. The Owl every now and then appeared at the window of his castle, sometimes to see who had arrived, and sometimes to look for the king, who was not yet in sight. Having glanced round, the Owl retreated to his study, doubtless to prepare his speech for this important occasion. The heaving up of the leaves and earth, as if an underground plough was at work, showed that the mole had not forgotten his duty; he had come to show his loyalty, and he brought a message from the badger, who had long since been left outside the concert of the animals and birds, humbly begging king Kapchack to accept his homage.

It is true that neither the Hare nor the rabbit were present, but that signified nothing, for they had no influence whatever. But the pheasant, who often stood aloof from the court, in his pride of lineage despising Kapchack though he was king, came on this occasion, for he too, like the

Squirrel, was alarmed at the progress of Choo Hoo, and dreaded a scarcity of the berries of the earth. Tchink, the chaffinch, one of the first to come, could not perch still, but restlessly passed round the circle, now talking to one and now to another, and sometimes peering in at the Owl's window. But merry as he was, he turned his back upon Te-te, the tom-tit, and chief of the spies, disdaining the acquaintance of a common informer. Te-te, not one whit abashed, sat on a willow, and lifted his voice from time to time.

The Jay came presently, and for some reason or other he was in high good spirits, and dressed in his gayest feathers. He chaffed the Owl, and joked with Tchink; then he laughed to himself, and tried to upset the grave old Cloctaw from his seat, and in short, played all sorts of pranks to the astonishment of everybody, who had hitherto seen him in such distress for the loss of his lady-love. Everybody thought he had lost his senses. Eric, the favourite missel-thrush (not the conspirator) took his station very high up on the ash above Kauc, whom he hated and suspected of treason, not hesitating even to say so aloud. Kauc, indeed, was not now quite comfort-

able in his position, but kept slyly glancing up at the missel-thrush, and would have gone elsewhere had it not been that everybody was looking.

The wood-pigeon came to the hawthorn, some little way from the castle; he represented, and was the chief of those pigeons who dwelt peacefully in Kapchack's kingdom, although aliens by race. His position was difficult in the extreme, for upon the one hand he knew full well that Kapchack was suspicious of him lest he should go over to Choo Hoo, and might at any moment order his destruction, and upon the other hand he had had several messages from Choo Hoo calling upon him to join his brethren, the invaders, on pain of severe punishment. Uncertain as to his fate, the wood-pigeon perched on the hawthorn at the skirt of the council place, hoping from thence to get some start if obliged to flee for his life. The dove, his friend, constant in misfortune, sat near him to keep him in countenance.

The humble-bee, the bee, the butterfly, the cricket, the grasshopper, the beetle, and many others arrived as the hour drew on. Last of all came Ki Ki, lord of all the hawks, attended with his retinue, and heralding the approach of the king. Ki Ki perched

on a tree at the side of the pollard, and his warriors ranged themselves around him: a terrible show, at which the Mouse verily shrank into the ground. Immediately afterwards a noise of wings and talking announced the arrival of Kapchack, who came in full state, with eight of his finest guards. The king perched on the top of the pollard, just over the Owl's window, and the eight magpies sat above and around, but always behind him.

"What an ugly old fellow he is!" whispered Bevis, who had never before seen him. "Look at his ragged tail!"

"Hush!" said the Squirrel, "Te-te is too near."

"Are they all here?" asked the king, after he had looked round and received the bows and lowly obeisance of his subjects.

"They are all here," said the Owl, sitting in his porch. "They are all here—at least, I think: no, they are not, your majesty."

"Who is absent?" said Kapchack, frowning, and all the assembly cowered.

"It is the Weasel," said the Owl. "The Weasel is not here."

Kapchack frowned and looked as black as thunder, and a dead silence fell upon the council.

"If it please your majesty," said the Humble-bee, presently coming to the front. "If it please your majesty, the Weasel——"

"It does *not* please me," said Kapchack.

But the Humble-bee began again, "If it please your majesty——"

"His majesty is *not* pleased," repeated the Owl severely.

But the Humble-bee, who could sing but one tune, began again, "If it please your majesty, the Weasel asked me to say——"

"What?" said the king in a terrible rage, "What did he say?"

"If it please your majesty," said the Humble-bee, who must begin over again every time he was interrupted, "the Weasel asked me to say that he sent his humble, his most humble, loyal, and devoted obedience, and begged that you would forgive his absence from the council, as he has just met with a severe accident in the hunting field, and cannot put one paw before the other."

"I do not believe it," said king Kapchack. "Where is he?"

"If it please your majesty," said the Humble-bee, "he is lying on a bank beyond the copse, stretched out in the sunshine, licking his paw, and hoping that rest and sunshine will cure him."

"Oh, what a story!" said Bevis.

"Hush," said the Squirrel.

"Somebody said it was a story," said the Owl.

"So it is," said Te-te. "I have made it my business to search out the goings-on of the Weasel, who has kept himself in the background of late, suspecting that he was up to no good, and with the aid of my lieutenant, the tree-climber, I have succeeded in discovering his retreat, which he has concealed even from your majesty."

"Where is it?" said Kapchack.

"It is in the elm, just there," said Te-te, "just by those raspberries."

"The rascal," said the Owl, in a great fright. "Then he has been close by all the time listening."

"Yes, he has been listening," said Te-te, meaningly.

The Owl became pale, remembering the secret meeting of the birds, and what was said there, all of which the treacherous Weasel must have overheard. He passed it off by exclaiming, "This is really intolerable."

"It *is* intolerable," said Kapchack; "and you," addressing the Humble-bee, "wretch that you are to bring me a false message——"

"If it please your majesty," began the Humble-bee, but he was seized upon by the bee (who was always jealous of him) and the butterfly, and the beetle, and hustled away from the precinct of the council.

"Bring the Weasel here, this instant," shouted Kapchack. "Drag him here by the ears."

Everybody stood up, but everybody hesitated, for though they all hated the Weasel they all feared him. Ki Ki, the hawk, bold as he was, could not do much in the bushes, nor enter a hole; Kauc, the crow, was in the like fix, and he intended if he was called upon to take refuge in the pretence of his age; the Stoat, fierce as he was, shrank from facing the Weasel, being afraid of his relation's tricks and stratagems. Even the Fox, though he was the

biggest of all, hesitated, for he recollected once when Pan, the spaniel, snapped at the Weasel, the Weasel made his teeth meet in Pan's nostrils.

Thus they all hesitated, when the Rat suddenly stood out and said, "I will fetch the Weasel, your majesty; I will bring that hateful traitor to your feet."

"Do so, good and loyal Rat," said the king, well pleased. And the Rat ran off to compel the Weasel to come.

As the elm was so close, they all looked that way, expecting to hear sounds of fighting; but in less than half a minute the Rat appeared, with the Weasel limping on three legs in his rear. For when the Weasel heard what the Rat said, he knew it was of no use to stay away any longer; but in his heart he vowed that he would, sooner or later, make the Rat smart for his officious interference.

When he came near, the Weasel fell down and bowed himself before the king, who said nothing, but eyed him scornfully.

"I am guilty," said the Weasel, in a very humble voice; "I am guilty of disobedience to your

majesty's commands, and I am guilty of sending you a deceitful message, for which my poor friend the Humble-bee has been cruelly hustled from your presence; but I am not guilty of the treason of which I am accused. I hid in the elm, your majesty, because I went in terror of my life, and I feigned to be ill, in order to stay away from the council, because there is not one of all these (he pointed to the circle of councillors) who has not sworn to destroy me, and I feared to venture forth. They have all banded together to compass my destruction, because I alone of all of them have remained faithful to your throne, and have not secretly conspired."

At these words, there was such an outcry on the part of all the birds and animals, that the wood echoed with their cries; for the Stoat snapped his teeth, and the Fox snarled, and the Jay screamed, and the Hawk flapped his wings, and the Crow said "Caw!" and the Rook "Haw!" and all so eagerly denied the imputation, that it was some minutes before even king Kapchack could make himself heard.

When the noise in some degree subsided, how-

ever, he said, "Weasel, you are so false of tongue, and you have so many shifts and contrivances ('That he has!' said Bevis, who was delighted at the downfall of the Weasel), that it is no longer possible for any of us to believe anything you say. We have now such important business before us, that we cannot stop to proceed to your trial and execution, and we therefore order that in the meantime you remain where you are, and that you maintain complete silence—for you are degraded from your rank—until such time as we can attend to your contemptible body, which will shortly dangle from a tree, as a warning to traitors for all time to come. My lords, we will now proceed with our business, and, first of all, the Secretary will read the roll-call of our forces."

The Owl then read the list of the army, and said, "First, your Majesty's devoted body-guard, with —with Prince Tchack-tchack (the King frowned, and the Jay laughed outright) at their head; Ki Ki, lord of hawks, one thousand beaks; the Rooks, five thousand beaks; Kauc, the crow, two hundred beaks;" and so on, enumerating the numbers which all the tribes could bring to battle.

In the buzz of conversation that arose while the Owl was reading (as it usually does), the Squirrel told Bevis that he believed the Crow had not returned the number of his warriors correctly, but that there were really many more, whom he purposely kept in the background. As for Prince Tchack-tchack, his absence from the council evidently disturbed his majesty, though he was too proud to show how he felt the defection of his eldest son and heir.

The number of the rooks, too, was not accurate, and did not give a true idea of their power, for it was the original estimate furnished many years ago, when Kapchack first organised his army, and although the rooks had greatly increased since then, the same return was always made. But it was well understood that the nation of the rooks could send, and doubtless would send, quite ten thousand beaks into the field.

"It is not a little curious," said the Squirrel, "that the rooks, who, as you know, belong to a limited monarchy—so limited that they have no real king—should form the main support of so despotic a monarch as Kapchack, who obtains even more de-

cisive assistance from them than from the ferocious and wily Ki Ki. It is an illustration of the singular complexity and paradoxical positions of politics that those who are naturally so opposed, should thus form the closest friends and allies. I do not understand why it is so myself, for as you know, dear, I do not attempt to meddle with politics, but the Owl has several times very learnedly discoursed to me upon this subject, and I gather from him that one principal reason why the rooks support the tyrant Kapchack, is because they well know if he is not king some one else will be. Now Kapchack, in return for their valuable services, has for one thing ordered Ki Ki on no account to interfere with them (which is the reason they have become so populous), and under the nominal rule of Kapchack they really enjoy greater liberty than they otherwise could.

"But the beginning of the alliance, it seems, was in this way. Many years ago, when Kapchack was a young monarch, and by no means firmly established upon his throne, he sought about for some means of gaining the assistance of the rooks. He observed that in the spring, when the rooks repaired their dwellings, they did so in a

very inferior manner, doing indeed just as their forefathers had done before them, and repeating the traditional architecture handed down through innumerable generations. So ill-constructed were their buildings, that if, as often chanced, the March winds blew with fury, it was a common thing to see the grass strewn with the wreck of their houses. Now Kapchack and all his race are excellent architects, and it occurred to him to do the rooks a service, by instructing them how to bind their lower courses, so that they should withstand the wind.

"With some difficulty, for the older rooks, though they would loudly deny it, are eminently conservative (a thing I do not profess to understand), he succeeded in persuading the younger builders to adopt his design; and the result was that in the end they all took to it, and now it is quite the exception to hear of an accident. Besides the preservation of life, Kapchack's invention also saved them an immense amount in timber for re-building. The consequence has been that the rooks have flourished above all other birds. They at once concluded an alliance with Kapchack, and as they increased in

numbers, so they became more firmly attached to his throne.

"It is not that they feel any gratitude—far from it, they are a selfish race—but they are very keen after their own interest, which is, perhaps, the strongest tie. For, as I observed, the rooks live under a limited monarchy; they had real kings of their own centuries since, but now their own king is only a name, a state fiction. Every single rook has a voice in the affairs of the nation (hence the tremendous clamour you may hear in their woods towards sunset when their assemblies are held), but the practical direction of their policy is entrusted to a circle or council of about ten of the older rooks, distinguished for their oratorical powers. These depute, again, one of their own number to Kapchack's court; you see him yonder, his name is Kauhaha. The council considers, I have no doubt, that by supporting Kapchack they retain their own supremacy, for very likely if they did not have a foreigner to reign over them, some clever genius of their own race would arise and overturn these mighty talkers.

"On the other hand Kapchack fully appreciates

their services, and if he dared he would give the chief command of his forces to the generalissimo of the rooks—not the one who sits yonder—the commander's name is Ah Kurroo. But he dreads the jealousy of Ki Ki, who is extremely off-handed and high in his ways, and might go off with his contingent. I am curious to see who will have the command. As for the starlings, I dare say you will notice their absence, they are under the jurisdiction of the rooks, and loyal as their masters; the reason they are not here is because they are already mobilised and have taken the field; they were despatched in all haste very early this morning, before you were awake, Bevis dear, to occupy the slope from whence the peewits fled. Now they are discussing the doubtful allies."

"The larks," the Owl was saying as the Squirrel finished, "have sent a message which I consider extremely impertinent. They have dared to say that they have nothing whatever to do with the approaching contest, and decline to join either party. They say that from time immemorial they have been free mountaineers, owing allegiance to no one, and if they have attended your court it has been from

courtesy, and not from any necessity that they were under."

"They are despicable creatures," said the king, who was secretly annoyed, but would not show it. "Ki Ki, I deliver them over to you; let your men plunder them as they like."

"The finches," went on the Owl. "I hardly know——"

"We are loyal to the last feather," said Tchink, the chaffinch, bold as brass, and coming to the front, to save his friends from the fate of the larks. "Your majesty, we are perfectly loyal—why our troops, whom you know are only lightly armed, have already gone forward, and have occupied the furze on the summits of the hills."

"I am much pleased," said the king, who had been a little doubtful. "Tell your friends to continue in that spirit."

"With all my heart," said Tchink, laughing in Ki Ki's face; he actually flew close by the terrible hawk, and made a face at him, for he knew that he was disappointed, having hoped for permission to tear and rend the finches as the larks.

"The thrushes," began the Owl again.

"Pooh," said the king, "they are feeble things; we can easily keep the whole nation of them in subjection by knocking out some of their brains now and then, can't we, Ki Ki?"

"It is a capital way," said Ki Ki. "There is no better."

"They are fit for nothing but ambassadors and couriers," said Kapchack. "We will not waste any more time over such folk whose opinions are nothing to us. Now I call upon you all to express your views as to the best means of conducting the campaign, and what measures had better be taken for the defence of our dominions. Ki Ki, speak first."

"I am for immediate action," said Ki Ki. "Let us advance and attack at once, for every day swells the ranks of Choo Hoo's army, and should there be early frosts it would be so largely increased that the mere numbers must push us back. Besides which in a short time he will receive large reinforcements, for his allies, the fieldfares and redwings, are preparing to set sail across the sea hither. But now, before his host becomes irresistible, is our opportunity; I counsel instant attack. War to the beak is my motto!"

"War to the beak," said the Crow.

"War to the beak," said the Jay, carefully adjusting his brightest feathers, "and our ladies will view our deeds."

"I agree," said the Rook, "with what Ki Ki says." The Rook was not so noisy and impetuous as the Hawk, but he was even more warlike, and by far the better statesman. "I think," Kauhaha went on, "that we should not delay one hour, but advance and occupy the plain where Choo Hoo is already diminishing our supplies of food. If our supplies are consumed or cut off our condition will become critical."

"Hear, hear," said everybody except the Crow, who hated the Rook. "Hear! hear! the Rook speaks well."

"All are then for immediately advancing?" said Kapchack, much pleased.

"May it please your majesty," said the Fox, thus humbling himself, he who was the descendant of kings, "May it please your majesty, I am not certain that the proposed course is the wisest. For, if I may be permitted to say so, it appears to me that the facts are exactly opposite to what Ki Ki

and the Rook have put forward as the reason for battle. My experience convinces me that the very vastness of Choo Hoo's host is really its weakness. The larger his numbers the less he can effect. It is clear that they must soon, if they continue to draw together in these enormous bodies, destroy all the forage of the country, and unless they are prepared to die of starvation they must perforce retire.

"If, therefore, your majesty could be prevailed upon to listen to my counsels, I would the rather suggest, most humbly suggest, that the defensive is your best course. Here in the copse you have an enclosure capable with a little trouble of being converted into an impregnable fortress. Already the ditches are deep, the curtain wall of hawthorn high and impenetrable, the approaches narrow. By retiring hither with your forces, occupying every twig, and opposing a beak in every direction, you would be absolutely safe, and it is easy to foresee what would happen.

"Choo Hoo, boastful and vainglorious, would approach with his enormous horde, he would taunt us, no doubt, with his absurd 'Koos-takke,' which I verily

believe has no meaning at all, and of which we need take no heed. In a few days, having exhausted the supplies, he would have to retire, and then sallying forth we could fall upon his rear and utterly destroy his unwieldy army."

This advice made some impression upon Kapchack, notwithstanding that he was much prejudiced against the Fox, for it was evidently founded upon facts, and the Fox was known to have had great experience. Kapchack appeared thoughtful, and leaning his head upon one side was silent, when Kauc, the crow (who had his own reasons for wishing Kapchack to run as much risk as possible), cried out that the Fox was a coward, and wanted to sneak into a hole. Ki Ki shouted applaudingly; the Rook said he for one could not shut himself up while the country was ravaged; and the Jay said the ladies would despise them. Kapchack remembered that the Fox had always had a character for duplicity, and perhaps had some secret motive for his advice, and just then, in the midst of the uproar, a starling flew into the circle with part of his tail gone and his feathers greatly ruffled.

It was evident that he had brought news from

the seat of war, and they all crowded about him. So soon as he had recovered breath the starling told them that half an hour since Choo Hoo had himself crossed the border, and driving in the outposts of the starlings, despite the most desperate resistance, had passed the front line of the hills. At this news the uproar was tremendous, and for some time not a word could be heard. By-and-by the Owl obtained something like order, when the Rook said he for one could not stay in council any longer, he must proceed to assemble the forces of his nation, as while they were talking his city might be seized. Ki Ki, too, flapping his wings, announced his intention of attacking; the Jay uttered a sneer about one-eyed people not being able to see what was straight before them, and thus goaded on against his better judgment, Kapchack declared his intention of sending his army to the front.

He then proceeded to distribute the commands. Ki Ki was proclaimed commander-in-chief (the Rook did not like this, but he said nothing, as he knew Kapchack could not help himself), the Rooks had the right wing, the Crow the left wing (the Crow was surprised at this, for his usual post was to guard

the rear, but he guessed at once that Kapchack suspected him, and would not leave him near the palace), and the Owl had the reserve. As they received their orders each flew off; even the Owl, though it was daylight, started forth to summon his men, and though he blundered against the branches, did not stay a second on that account. The Squirrel had charge of the stores, and jumped down to see after them. Not one was forgotten, but each had an office assigned, and went to execute it, all except the Fox and the Weasel. The Weasel, obedient to orders, lay still at the foot of the pollard, humbly hiding his head.

The Fox, presently finding that he had been overlooked, crept under Kapchack, and, bowing to the earth, asked if there was no command and no employment for him.

"Begone," said Kapchack, who was not going to entrust power to one of royal descent. "Begone, sir; you have not shown any ability lately."

"But did not the gnat tell you," began the Fox, humbly.

"The gnat told me a great deal," said Kapchack.

"But did he not say I sent him?"

"No, indeed," said Kapchack, for the gnat, not to be outdone, had indeed delivered the Fox's message, but had taken the credit of it for himself. "Begone, sir (the Fox slunk away); and do you (to his guards) go to the firs and wait for me there." The eight magpies immediately departed, and there was no one left but the Weasel.

The king looked down at the guilty traitor; the traitor hung his head. Presently the king said: "Weasel, false and double-tongued Weasel, did I not choose you to be my chiefest and most secret counsellor? Did you not know everything? Did I not consult you on every occasion, and were you not promoted to high honour and dignity? And you have repaid me by plotting against my throne, and against my life; the gnat has told me everything, and it is of no avail for you to deny it. You double traitor, false to me and false to those other traitors who met in this very place to conspire against me. It is true you were not among them in person, but why were you not among them? Do you suppose that I am to be deceived for a moment? Wretch that you are. You set them on to plot against me

while you kept out of it with clean paws, that you might seize the throne so soon as I was slain. Wretch that you are."

Here the Weasel could not endure it any longer, but crawling to the foot of the tree, besought the king with tears in his eyes, to do what he would —to order him to instant execution, but not to reproach him with these enormities, which cut him to the very soul. But the more he pleaded, the more angry Kapchack became, and heaped such epithets upon the crouching wretch, and so bitterly upbraided him that at last the Weasel could bear it no more, but driven as it were into a corner, turned to bay, and faced the enraged monarch.

He sat up, and looking Kapchack straight in the face, as none but so hardened a reprobate could have done, he said, in a low but very distinct voice—"You have no right to say these things to me, any more than you have to wear the crown! I do not believe you are Kapchack at all—you are an impostor!"

At these words Kapchack became as pale as death, and could not keep his perch upon the pollard, but fluttered down to the ground beside

the Weasel. He was so overcome that for a moment or two he could not speak. When he found breath, he turned to the Weasel and asked him what he meant. The Weasel, who had now regained his spirits, said boldly enough that he meant what he said; he did not believe that the king was really Kapchack.

"But I am Kapchack," said the king, trembling, and not knowing how much the Weasel knew.

In truth the Weasel knew very little, but had only shot a bolt at random from the bow of his suspicions, but he had still a sharper shaft to shoot, and he said, "You are an impostor, for you told La Schach, who has jilted you, that you were not so old as you looked."

"The false creature!" said Kapchack, quite beside himself with rage. In his jealousy of Prince Tchack-tchack, who was so much younger, and had two eyes, he had said this, and now he bitterly repented his vanity. "The false creature!" he screamed, "where is she? I will have her torn to pieces! She shall be pecked limb from limb! Where is she?" he shrieked. "She left the palace yesterday evening, and I have not seen her since."

"She went to the firs with the Jay," said the Weasel. "He is her old lover, you know. Did you not see how merry he was just now, at the council?"

Then Kapchack pecked up the ground with his beak, and tore at it with his claws, and gave way to his impotent anger.

"There shall not be a feather of her left!" he said. "I will have her utterly destroyed! She shall be nailed to a tree!"

"Nothing of the kind," said the Weasel, with a sneer. "She is too beautiful. As soon as you see her, you will kiss her and forgive her."

"It is true," said Kapchack, becoming calmer. "She is so beautiful, she must be forgiven. Weasel, in consideration of important services rendered to the state in former days, upon this one occasion you shall be pardoned. Of course the condition is that what has passed between us this day is kept strictly private, and that you do not breathe a word of it."

"Not a word of it," said the Weasel.

"And you must disabuse your mind of that extraordinary illusion as to my identity of which

you spoke just now. You must dismiss so absurd an idea from your mind."

"Certainly," said the Weasel, "it is dismissed entirely. But, your majesty, with your permission, I would go further. I would endeavour to explain to you, that although my conduct was indiscreet, and so far open to misconstruction, there was really nothing more in it than an ill-directed zeal in your service. It is really true, your majesty, that all the birds and animals are leagued against me, and that is why I have been afraid to stir abroad. I was invited to the secret council, of which you have heard from the gnat, and because I did not attend it, they have one and all agreed to vilify me to your majesty.

"But in fact I, for once, with the service of your majesty in view, descended (repugnant as it was to my feelings) to play the eavesdropper, and I overheard all that was said, and I can convince your majesty that there are far greater traitors in your dominions than you ever supposed me to be. The gnat does not know half that took place at the council, for he only had it second-hand from that villain, the Fox, who is, I believe, secretly

bent on your destruction. But I can tell you not only all that went on—I can also relate to you the designs of Kauc, the crow, who conferred with Cloctaw in private, after the meeting was over. And I can also give you good reasons for suspecting Ki Ki, the hawk, whom you have just nominated to the command of your forces, of the intention of making a bargain with Choo Hoo, and of handing you over to him a prisoner."

Now this last was a pure invention of the Weasel's out of envy, since Ki Ki had obtained such distinction. Kapchack, much alarmed at these words, ordered him to relate everything in order, and the Weasel told him all that had been said at the council, all that Kauc, the crow, had said to Cloctaw, and a hundred other matters which he made up himself. When Kapchack heard these things he was quite confounded, and exclaimed that he was surrounded with traitors, and that he did not see which way to turn. He hopped a little way off, in order the better to consider by himself, and leant his head upon one side.

First he thought to himself, "I must take the command from Ki Ki, but I cannot do that

suddenly, lest he should go over to Choo Hoo. I will therefore do it gradually. I will countermand the order for an immediate attack; that will give me time to arrange. Who is to take Ki Ki's place? Clearly the Weasel, for though he is an arch-traitor, yet he is in the same boat with me; for I know it to be perfectly true that all of them are bitter against him."

So he went back to the Weasel, and told him that he should give him the chief command of the forces, on the third day following, and meantime told him to come early in the evening to the drain which passed under the orchard, where his palace was, so that he could concert the details of this great state business in secret with him.

The Weasel, beyond measure delighted at the turn things had taken, and rejoicing extremely at the impending fall of Ki Ki, whom he hated, thanked Kapchack with all his might, till Kapchack, enjoining on him the necessity of secrecy, said "Good afternoon;" and flew away towards the firs, where his guard was waiting for him. Then the Weasel puffed up, and treading the ground proudly, went back to his cave in the elm, and

Bevis, seeing that there was nothing more going on that day, stole back to the raspberry canes.

None of them had noticed, not even the cunning Weasel, that the mole, when the council broke up, had not left with the rest: indeed, being under the surface of the earth they easily overlooked him. Now the mole, who hated the Weasel beyond all, had waited to have the pleasure of hearing king Kapchack upbraid the traitor, and presently consign him to execution. Fancy then his feelings when, after all, the Weasel was received into the highest favour, and promised the supreme command of the army, while he himself was not even noticed, though he was a clever engineer, and could mine and countermine, and carry on siege operations better than any of them.

He listened to all that was said attentively, and then, so soon as Kapchack had flown away, and the Weasel had gone to his hole, and Bevis to the raspberries, he drove a tunnel to the edge of the copse, and there calling a fly, sent him with a message to the hawk, asking Ki Ki to meet him beside the leaning stone in the field (which Bevis had once passed), because he had a

secret to communicate which would brook no delay. At the same time, as Kapchack was flying to the firs where his guards were waiting, it occurred to him that, although he had no alternative, it was dangerous in the extreme to trust the army to the Weasel, who, perhaps, just as there was an opportunity of victory would retire, and leave him to be destroyed. Thinking about this, he perched on a low hawthorn bush, and asked himself whether it was worth while to attempt to defend a kingdom held under such precarious tenure? Would it not be better to make terms with Choo Hoo, who was not unreasonable, and to divide the territory, and thus reign in peace and safety over half at least, —making it, of course, a condition of the compact that Choo Hoo should help him to put down all domestic traitors.

The idea seemed so good that, first glancing round to see that he was not observed, he called a thrush, who had been coming to the hawthorn, but dared not enter it while the king was there. The thrush, much frightened, came as he was bid, and Kapchack carefully instructed him in what he was to do. Having learnt his message by heart,

the thrush, delighted beyond expression at so high a negotiation being entrusted to him, flew straight away towards Choo Hoo's camp. But not unobserved; for just then Ki Ki, wheeling in the air at an immense height, whither he had gone to survey the scene of war, chanced to look down and saw him quit the king, and marked the course he took. Kapchack, unaware that Ki Ki had detected this manœuvre, now returned to his guards, and flew to his palace.

Meantime the Weasel, curled up on his divan in the elm, was thinking over the extraordinary good fortune that had befallen him. Yet such was his sagacity that even when thus about to attain almost the topmost pinnacle of his ambition, he did not forget the instability of affairs, but sought to confirm his position, or even to advance it. He reflected that Kapchack was not only cunning beyond everything ever known, but he was just now a prey to anxieties, and consumed with jealousy, which upset the tenour of his mind, so that his course could not be depended upon, but might be changed in a moment. The favour of a despotic monarch was never a firm staff to lean upon; when that monarch was on the

brink of a crisis which threatened both his throne and his life, his smile might become a frown before any one was aware that a change was impending.

Impressed with these ideas, the Weasel asked himself how he could at once secure his position and advance himself to further dignity. He considered that up to the present the forces of Kapchack had always been compelled to retreat before the overwhelming masses thrown against them by Choo Hoo. He could scarcely hope under the most favourable circumstances to do more than defend the frontier, and should Choo Hoo win the battle, Kapchack would either be taken prisoner, or, what was not at all unlikely, fall a victim during the confusion, and be assassinated, perhaps, by the villanous Crow. Where, then, would be his own high command? But by making terms with Choo Hoo he might himself obtain the throne, and reign perfectly secure as Choo Hoo's regent.

On coming to this conclusion, he called to his old friend, the Humble-bee, and said he desired to send a message to Choo Hoo, the purport of which must not be divulged to any flower upon the route. The Humble-bee instantly guessed that this message must

be something to the injury of Kapchack, and resenting the manner in which he had been hustled from the council, declared that he would carry it without a moment's delay.

"Go then, my friend," said the Weasel. "Go straight to Choo Hoo, and say—'The Weasel is appointed to the command of king Kapchack's army, and will supersede Ki Ki, the hawk, upon the third day. On that day he will lead forth the army to the south, professing to go upon a flank march, and to take you in the rear. Be not deceived by this movement, but so soon as you see that the guards are withdrawn from the frontier, cross the border in force, and proceed straight towards the palace. When Kapchack's army finds you between it and its base of supplies it will disperse, and you will obtain an easy victory.

"And in proof of his good will towards you, the Weasel, furthermore, bade me inform you of the great secret which has hitherto been preserved with such care, and which will enable your army to remain in this place all the winter. In the Squirrel's copse there is a spring, which is never frozen, but always affords excellent drinking water, and moistens a con-

siderable extent of ground." This was the Weasel's message, and without a moment's delay the Humble-bee buzzed away direct to Choo Hoo's camp.

At the same time the fly with the mole's message reached Ki Ki, the hawk, as he was soaring among the clouds. Ki Ki having finished his observations, and full of suspicions as to the object with which the king had despatched the thrush to Choo Hoo, decided to keep the mole's appointment at once, so down he flew direct to the leaning stone in the meadow, where Bevis had gathered the cowslips, and found the mole already waiting for him.

Now, the mole hated Ki Ki exceedingly, because, as previously related, he had killed his wife, but he hated the Weasel, who had persecuted him all his life, even more, and by thus betraying the Weasel to the Hawk he hoped to set the two traitors by the ears, and to gratify his own vengeance by seeing them tear each other to pieces. Accordingly he now informed Ki Ki of everything—how the Weasel had disclosed the names of all those who attended the secret meeting (exeept one, *i.e.*, the Owl, which, for reasons of his own, the Weasel had suppressed), particularly stating that Ki Ki had taken a foremost part,

that Kapchack was enraged against the Hawk, and had already promised the Weasel the chief command, so that in three days Ki Ki would be superseded.

Ki Ki, suppressing his agitation, thanked the mole very cordially for his trouble, and soared towards the sky, but he had scarce gone a hundred yards before one of Kapchack's bodyguard met him with a message from the king countermanding the advance of the army which had been decided upon. Ki Ki replied that his majesty's orders should be implicitly obeyed, and continued his upward flight. He had now no doubt that what the mole had told him was correct in every particular, since it had been so immediately confirmed, and as for the thrush, it seemed clear that Kapchack had some design of saving himself by the sacrifice of his friends. That must be his reason for countermanding the advance—to give time for negotiation. Angry beyond measure, Ki Ki flew to his own clump of trees, and calling to him a keen young hawk—one of his guard, and who was only too delighted to be selected for confidential employment—sent him with a flag of truce to Choo Hoo.

He was to say that Ki Ki, being disgusted with

the treachery of king Kapchack, had determined to abandon his cause, and that on the day of battle in the midst of the confusion, if Choo Hoo would push forward rapidly, Ki Ki would draw off his contingent and expose the centre, when Kapchack must inevitably be destroyed. Away flew the hawk, and thus in one hour Choo Hoo received three messengers.

CHAPTER II.

TRAITORS.

The first that arrived was the thrush, bearing the message from the king. Choo Hoo, delighted beyond expression at so pleasant a solution of the business, which he knew must, if it came to battle, entail great slaughter of his friends, received the thrush with the highest honours, called his principal counsellors around him, and acceded to everything king Kapchack had proposed. The territory should be equally divided: Choo Hoo to have the plains, and Kapchack the woods and hills, and peace should be proclaimed, Choo Hoo engaging to support Kapchack against all domestic enemies and traitors. This treaty having been completed, the thrush made as if about to depart, but Choo Hoo would in no wise permit this. "Remain with us," he said, "my dear thrush, till the evening, feast and make merry."

So the thrush was surrounded with a guard of honour, and conducted to the choicest feeding places, and regaled upon the fat of the land. Thus enjoying himself, he thought it was the happiest day of his life, and was not at all desirous of seeing the shadows lengthen.

Hardly had the thrush gone with his guard to the banquet, than the Humble-bee was announced, bearing the message from the Weasel. To this the assembled counsellors listened attentively, but Choo Hoo, being only a barbarian, could on no account break faith, but was resolved to carry out his compact with king Kapchack. Nevertheless, he reflected that the king was extremely cunning, and not altogether to be relied upon (the Humble-bee, for aught he knew, might have been in reality sent by Kapchack to try him), and therefore he would go so far as this, he would encourage the Weasel without committing himself. "Return," he said to the Humble-bee, "Return to him who sent you, and say, 'Do you do your part, and Choo Hoo will certainly do his part.'" With which ambiguous sentence (which of course the Weasel read in his own sense), he dismissed the Humble-bee, who had

scarce departed from the camp, than the flag of truce arrived from Ki Ki, and the young hawk, bright and defiant in his bearing, was admitted to the great emperor Choo Hoo.

When the council heard his message they all cried with one accord, "Koos-takke! koos-takke! the enemy are confounded; they are divided against each other. They are delivered over to us. Koos-takke!"

So soon as there was silence, Choo Hoo said, "Young sir, tell your master that we do not need his assistance," and he waved the messenger to depart.

But the hawk said, "Mighty emperor, consider that I am young, and that if I go to my master with so curt a message, you know that he is fierce beyond reason, and I shall infallibly be torn to pieces."

"Very well," said Choo Hoo, speaking in a harsh tone of voice, for he hated the whole race of hawks, and could scarce respect the flag of truce, "Very well, tell your master the reason I do not want his assistance is, first, because Kapchack and I have concluded a treaty; secondly, because the

Weasel has been before him, and has told me where the secret spring is in the Squirrel's copse—the spring that does not freeze in winter."

The hawk, not daring to parley further with the emperor, bowed his way out, and went direct to Ki Ki with this reply.

All the council of Choo Hoo rejoiced exceedingly, both at the treaty which assured so peaceful and pleasant a conclusion to their arduous labours, and to a sanguinary war which had lasted so many years, and in which they had lost so many of their bravest, and also at the treachery which prevailed in Kapchack's palace and confounded his efforts. They cried, "Koos-takke!" and the shout was caught up throughout the camp with such vehemence, that the woods echoed to the mysterious sound.

Now the young hawk, winging his way swiftly through the air, soon arrived at the trees where Ki Ki was waiting for him, and delivered the answer in fear and trembling, expecting every moment to be dashed to the ground and despatched. Ki Ki, however, said nothing, but listened in silence, and then sat a long time thinking.

Presently he said, "You have done ill, and have

not given much promise of your future success; you should not have taken Choo Hoo's answer so quickly. You should have argued with him, and used your persuasive powers. Moreover, being thus admitted to the very presence of our greatest enemy, and standing face to face with him, and within a few inches of his breast, you should have known what it was your business to do. I could not tell you beforehand, because it would have been against my dignity to seem to participate before the deed in things of that kind. To you the opportunity was afforded, but you had not the ready wit either to see, or to seize it.

"While Choo Hoo was deliberating you should have flown at his breast, and despatched the arch-rebel with one blow of your beak. In the confusion you could have escaped with ease. Upon such a catastrophe becoming known, the whole of Choo Hoo's army would have retreated, and hanging upon their rear we could have wreaked our wills upon them. As for you, you would have obtained fame and power; as for me, I should have retained the chief command; as for Kapchack, he would have rewarded you with untold wealth. But you missed—you did not even see—this golden

opportunity, and you will never have another such a chance."

At this, the young hawk hung his head, and could have beaten himself to death against the tree, in shame and sorrow at his folly.

"But," continued Ki Ki, "as I see you are unfeignedly sorry, I will even yet entrust you with one more commission (the hawk began to brighten up a little). You know that at the end of the Longpond there is a very large wood which grows upon a slope; at the foot of the slope there is an open space or glade, which is a very convenient spot for an ambush. Now when the thrush comes home in the evening, bringing the treaty to Kapchack, he is certain to pass that way, because it is the nearest, and the most pleasant. Go there and stay in ambush till you hear him coming, then swoop down and kill him, and tear his heart from his breast. Do not fail, or never return to my presence.

"And stay—you may be sure of the place I mean, because there is an old oak in the midst of the glade, it is old and dead, and the route of the thrush will be under it. Strike him there."

Without waiting a moment, the hawk, knowing

that his master liked instant obedience, flew off swift as the wind, determined this time to succeed. He found the glade without trouble, and noted the old oak with its dead gaunt boughs, and then took up his station on an ash, where he watched eagerly for the shadows to lengthen. Ki Ki, after sitting a little longer, soared up into the sky to reflect upon further measures. By destroying the thrush he knew that the war must continue, for Choo Hoo would never believe but that it had been done by Kapchack's order, and could not forgive so brutal an affront to an ambassador charged with a solemn treaty. Choo Hoo must then accept his (Ki Ki's) offer; the Weasel, it was true, had been before him, but he should be able to destroy the Weasel's influence by revealing his treachery to Kapchack, and how he had told Choo Hoo the secret of the spring which was never frozen. He felt certain that he should be able to make his own terms, both with Kapchack and Choo Hoo.

Thus soaring up he saw his messenger, the young hawk, swiftly speeding to the ambush, and smiled grimly as he noted the eager haste with which the youthful warrior went to fulfil his orders. Still spar-

ing, with out-stretched wings, he sought the upper sky.

Meantime Bevis had grown tired of waiting for the Squirrel, who had gone off to see about the stores, and flung himself at full length on the moss under the oak. He hardly stopped there a minute before he got up again and called and shouted for the Squirrel, but no one answered him; nor did the dragon-fly appear. Bevis, weary of waiting, determined to try and find his way home by himself, but when he came to look round he could not discover the passage through the thicket. As he was searching for it he passed the elm, which was hollow inside, where the Weasel lay curled up on his divan, and the Weasel, hearing Bevis go by, was so puffed up with pride, that he actually called to him, having conceived a design of using Bevis for his own purposes.

"Sir Bevis! Sir Bevis!" he said, coming to the mouth of his hole, "Sir Bevis, I want to speak to you!"

"You are the Weasel," said Bevis, "I know your hateful voice—I hate you, and if ever I find you outside the copse I will smash you into twenty pieces. If it was not for the Squirrel, whom I love (and I

have promised not to hurt anything in his copse) I would bring my papa's hatchet and chop your tree down and cut your head off; so there."

"If you did that," said the Weasel, "then you would not know what the Rat is going to do in your house to-night."

"Why should I not know?" said Bevis.

"Because if you cut my head off I could not tell you."

"Well, tell me what it is," said Bevis; who was always very curious, "and make haste about it, for I want to go home."

"I will," said the Weasel, "and first of all, you know the fine large cake that your mamma is making for you?"

"No," said Bevis, excitedly, "Is she making me a cake? I did not know it."

"Yes, that she is, but she did not tell you, because she wished it to be a surprise to you to-morrow morning at lunch, and it is no use for you to ask her about it, for she would not tell you. But if you are not very sharp it is certain that you will never touch a mouthful of it."

"Why not?" said Bevis.

"Because," said the Weasel, "the Mouse has found out where your mamma has put it in the cupboard, and there is a little chink through which he can smell it, but he cannot quite get through, nor is he strong enough to gnaw such very hard wood, else you may depend he would have kept the secret to himself. But as he could not creep through he has gone and told Raoul, the Rat, who has such strong teeth he can bite a way through anything, and to-night, when you are all in bed and firm asleep, and everything is quiet, Yish, the Mouse, is going to show the Rat where the chink is, the Rat is going to gnaw a hole, and in the morning there will be very little left of your cake."

"I will tell the Bailiff," said Bevis in a rage, "and the Bailiff shall set a trap for the Rat."

"Well, that was what I was going to suggest," said the Weasel; "but upon consideration I am not so sure that it is much use telling the Bailiff, because, as I daresay you recollect, the Bailiff has often tried his hand setting up a trap for the Rat, but has never yet caught him, from which I conclude that the Rat knows all the places where the Bailiff

sets the trap, and takes good care not to go that way without previous examination."

"I'll set up the trap," said Bevis, "I'll set it up myself in a new place. Let me see, where can I put it?"

"I think it would be a very good plan if you did put it up yourself," said the Weasel, "because there is no doubt you understand more about these things than the Bailiff, who is getting old."

"Yes," said Bevis, "I know all about it—I can do it very well indeed."

"Just what I thought," said the Weasel, "I thought to myself, Bevis knows all about it—Bevis can do it. Now, as the Bailiff has set up the trap by the drain or grating beside the carthouse, and under the wood-pile, and by the pump, and has never caught the Rat, it is clear that the Rat knows these places as well as the Bailiff, and if you remember there is a good deal of grass grows there, so that the Rat no doubt says to himself, 'Aha! They are sure to put the trap here, because they think I shall not see it in the grass—as if I was so silly.' So that, depend upon it, he is always very careful how he goes through the grass there.

"Therefore I think the best place you could select to set up the trap would be somewhere where there is no kind of cover, no grass, nor anything, where it is quite bare and open, and where the Rat would run along quickly and never think of any danger. And he would be sure to run much faster and not stay to look under his feet in crossing such places, lest Pan should see him and give chase, or your papa should come round the corner with a gun. Now I know there is one such place the Rat passes every evening; it is a favourite path of his, because it is a short cut to the stable—it is under the wall of the pigstye. I know this, because I once lived with the Rat a little while, and saw all his habits.

"Well, under this wall it is quite open, and he always runs by extremely fast, and that is the best place to put the trap. Now when you have set the trap, in order to hide it from view do you get your little spade with which your dig in your garden, and take a spadeful of the dust that lies about there (as it is so dry there is plenty of dust) and throw it over the trap. The dust will hide the trap, and will also prevent the Rat (for he has a wonderful sharp nose of his own) from scenting where your

fingers touched it. In the morning you are sure to find him caught.

"By-the-by, you had better not say anything to your mamma that you know of the cake, else perhaps she will move it from the cupboard, and then the Rat may go on some other moonlit ramble instead. As I said, in the morning you are sure to find him in the trap, and then do not listen to anything he has to say, for he has a lying tongue, but let Pan loose, who will instantly worry him to death."

"I will do as you say," said Bevis, "for I see that it is a very clever way to catch the Rat, but Sir Weasel, you have told me so many false stories that I can scarce believe you now it is plain you are telling me the truth; nor shall I feel certain that you are this time (for once in your wicked life) saying the truth, unless I know why you are so anxious for the Rat to be caught."

"Why," said the Weasel, "I will tell you the reason; this afternoon the Rat played me a very mean and scurvy trick; he disgraced me before the king, and made me a common laughing-stock to all the council, for which I swore to have his life. Besides upon one occasion he bit his teeth right through my

ear—the marks of it are there still. See for yourself." So the Weasel thrust his head out of his hole, and Bevis saw the marks left by the Rat's teeth, and was convinced that the Weasel, out of malice, had at last been able for once to tell the truth.

"You are a horrid wretch," said Bevis, "still you know how to catch the Rat, and I will go home and do it; but I cannot find my way out of this thicket —the Squirrel ought to come."

"The way is under the ash bough there," said the Weasel, "and when you are outside the thicket turn to your left and go down hill, and you will come to the timber—and meantime I will send for the dragon-fly, who will overtake you."

"All right, horrid wretch," said Bevis, and away he went. Now all this that the Weasel had said really was true, except about the cake; it was true that the Rat was very careful going through the grass, and that he knew where the Bailiff set the gin, and that he used to run very quickly across the exposed place under the wall of the pigstye. But the story about the cake he had made up out of his cunning head just to set Bevis at work to put up the trap; and he hoped too, that while Bevis was setting

up the gin, the spring would slip and pinch his fingers.

By thus catching the Rat, the Weasel meant in the first place to gratify his own personal malice, and next to get rid of a very formidable competitor. For the Rat was very large and very strong, and brave and bold beyond all the others; so much so that the Weasel would even have preferred to have a struggle with the Fox (though he was so much bigger) whose nostril he could bite, than to meet the Rat in fair and equal combat. Besides, he hated the Rat beyond measure, because the Rat had helped him out of the drain, which was when his ear was bitten through. He intended to go down to the farmyard very early next morning when the Rat was caught, and to go as near as he dared and taunt the Rat, and tell him how Pan would presently come and crunch up his ribs. To see the Rat twist, and hear him groan, would be rare sport; it made his eyes glisten to think of it. He was very desirous that Bevis should find his way home all right, so he at once sent a wasp for the dragon-fly, and the dragon-fly at once started after Bevis.

Just after the Weasel had sent the wasp, the

Humble-bee returned from Choo Hoo, and delivered the emperor's message, which the Weasel saw at once was intended to encourage him in his proposed treachery. He thanked the Humble-bee for the care and speed with which his errand had been accomplished, and then curled himself up on his divan to go to sleep, so as to be ready to go down early in the morning and torment the Rat. As he was very happy since his schemes were prospering, he went to sleep in a minute as comfortable as could be.

Bevis crept through the thicket, and turned to the left, and went down the hill, and found the timber, and then went along the green track till he came to the stile. He got over the bridge and followed the footpath, when the dragon-fly overtook him, and apologised most sincerely for his neglect. "For," said he, "we are so busy making ready for the army, and I have had so much to do going to and fro with messages, that my dear Sir Bevis, you must forgive me for forgetting you. Next time I will send a moth to stay close by you, so that the moment you want me the moth can go and fetch me."

"I will forgive you just this once," said Bevis; and the dragon-fly took him all the way home. After

tea Bevis went and found the gin, and tried to set it up under the pigstye wall, just as the Weasel had told him; but at first he could not quite manage it, being as usual in such a hurry.

Now there was a snail on the wall, and the snail looked out of his shell and said, "Sir Bevis, do not be too quick. Believe me, if you are too quick to-day you are sure to be sorry to-morrow."

"You are a stupid snail," said Bevis. Just then, as the Weasel had hoped, he pinched his fingers with the spring so hard that tears almost came into his eyes.

"That was your fault," he said to the snail; and snatching the poor thing off the wall, he flung him ever so far; fortunately the snail fell on the grass, and was not hurt, but he said to himself that in future, no matter what he saw going on, he would never interfere, but let people hurt themselves as much as they liked. But Bevis, though he was so hasty, was also very persevering, and presently he succeeded in setting up the trap, and then taking his spade he spread the dust over it and so hid it as the Weasel had told him to. He then went and put his spade back in the summer-house, and having told Pan that

in the morning there would be a fine big rat for him to worry, went in-doors.

Now it is most probable that what the Weasel had arranged so well would all have happened just as he foresaw, and that the trap so cleverly set up would have caught the Rat, had not the Bailiff, when he came home from the fields, chanced to see Bevis doing it. He had to attend to something else then, but by-and-by, when he had finished, he went and looked at the place where Bevis had set the gin, and said to himself, "Well, it is a very good plan to set up the gin, for the Rat is always taking the pig's food, and even had a gnaw at my luncheon, which was tied up in my handkerchief, and which I—like a stupid—left on the ground in my hurry instead of hanging it up. But it is a pity Sir Bevis should have set it here, for there is no grass or cover, and the Rat is certain to see it, and Bevis will be disappointed in the morning, and will not find the Rat. Now I will just move the gin to a place where the Rat always comes, and where it will be hidden by the grass, that is, just at the mouth of the drain by the carthouse; it will catch the Rat there, and Sir Bevis will be pleased."

So the Bailiff, having thought this to himself, as he

leant against the wall, and listened to the pigs snoring, carefully took up the gin and moved it down to the mouth of the drain by the carthouse, and there set it up in the grass.

The Rat was in the drain, and when he heard the Bailiff's heavy footsteps, and the noise he made fumbling about with the trap, he laughed, and said to himself, "Fumble away, you old stupid—I know what you are doing. You are setting up a gin in the same place you have set it twenty times before. Twenty times you have set the gin up there and never caught anything, and yet you cannot see, and you cannot understand, and you never learn anything, and you are the biggest dolt and idiot that ever walked, or rather, you would be, only I thank Heaven everybody else is just like you! As if I could not hear what you are doing; as if I did not look very carefully before I come out of my hole, and before I put my foot down on grass or leaves, and as if I could not smell your great clumsy fingers: really I feel insulted that you should treat me as if I was so foolish. However, upon the whole, this is rather nice and considerate of you. Ha! Ha!" and the Rat laughed so loud that if the Bailiff had been sharp he must have heard this unusual

chuckling in the drain. But he heard nothing, but went off down the road very contented with himself, whistling a bar from Madame Angôt which he had learnt from Bevis.

When Bevis went to bed he just peeped out of the window to look at the moon, but the sky was now overcast, and the clouds were hurrying by, and the wind rising—which the snail had expected, or he would not have ventured out along the wall. While Bevis was peeping out he saw the Owl go by over the orchard and up beside the hedge.

The very same evening the young hawk, as has been previously related, had gone to the glade in the wood, and sat there in ambush waiting for the thrush. Like Sir Bevis, the hawk was extremely impatient, and the time as he sat on the ash passed very slowly, till at last he observed with much delight that the sun was declining, and that the shadow of the dead oak tree would soon reach across towards him.

The thrush, having sat at the banquet the whole of the afternoon, and tasted every dainty that the camp of Choo Hoo afforded, surrounded all the time by crowds of pleasant companions, on the other hand, saw the

shadows lengthening with regret. He knew that it was time for him to depart and convey the intelligence to king Kapchack that Choo Hoo had fully agreed to his proposal. Still loth to leave he lingered, and it was not until dusk that he quitted the camp, accompanied a little way over the frontier by some of Choo Hoo's chief counsellors, who sought in every way to do him honour. Then wishing him good-night, with many invitations to return shortly, they left him to pursue his journey.

Knowing that he ought to have returned to the king before this, the thrush put forth his best speed, and thought to himself as he flew what a long account he should have to give his wife and his children (who were now grown up) of the high and important negotiation with which he had been entrusted, and of the attentions that had been paid to him by the emperor. Happy in these anticipations, he passed rapidly over the fields and the woods, when just as he flew beneath the old dead oak in the glade down swooped the hawk and bore him to the ground. In an instant a sharp beak was driven into his head, and then, while yet his body quivered, the feathers were plucked from his breast and his

heart laid bare. Hungry from his fast, for he had touched nothing that day, being so occupied with his master's business, the hawk picked the bones, and then, after the manner of his kind, wishing to clean his beak, flew up and perched on a large dead bough of the oak just overhead.

The moment he perched, a steel trap which had been set there by the keeper, flew up and caught him, with such force that his limbs were broken. With a shriek the hawk flapped his wings to fly, but this only pulled his torn and bleeding legs, and overcome with the agony, he fainted, and hung head downwards from the bough, suspended by his sinews. Now this was exactly what Ki Ki had foreseen would happen. There were a hundred places along the thrush's route where an ambush might have been placed, as well as in the glade, but Ki Ki had observed that a trap was set upon the old dead oak, and ordered his servant to strike the thrush there, so that he might step into it afterwards, thus killing two birds with one stone.

He desired the death of his servant lest he should tell tales, and let out the secret mission upon which he had been employed, or lest he should boast, in the vain glory of youth, of having slain the ambassador.

Cruel as he was, Ki Ki, too, thought of the torture the young hawk would endure with delight, and said to himself that it was hardly an adequate punishment for having neglected so golden an opportunity for assassinating Choo Hoo. From the fate of the thrush and the youthful hawk, it would indeed appear that it is not always safe to be employed upon secret business of state. Yet Ki Ki, with all his cruel cunning, was not wholly successful.

For the Owl, as he went his evening rounds, after he had flown over the orchard where Bevis saw him, went on up the hedge by the meadow, and skirting the shore of the Longpond, presently entered the wood and glided across the glade towards the dead oak tree, which was one of his favourite haunts. As he came near he was horrified to hear miserable groans and moans, and incoherent talking, and directly afterwards saw the poor hawk hanging head downwards. He had recovered his consciousness only to feel again the pressure of the steel, and the sharp pain of his broken limbs, which presently sent him into a delirium.

The Owl circling round the tree was so overcome by the spectacle that he too nearly fainted, and said to himself, "It is clear that my lucky star rose to

night, for without a doubt the trap was intended for me. I have perched on that very bough every evening for weeks, and I should have alighted there to-night had not the hawk been before me. I have escaped from the most terrible fate which ever befel any one, to which indeed crucifixion, with an iron nail through the brain, is mercy itself, for that is over in a minute, but this miserable creature will linger till the morning."

So saying, he felt so faint that (first looking very carefully to see that there were no more traps) he perched on a bough a little way above the hawk. The hawk, in his delirium, was talking of all that he had done and heard that day, reviling Ki Ki and Choo Hoo, imploring destruction upon his master's head, and then flapping his wings and so tearing his sinews and grinding his broken bones together, he shrieked with pain. Then again he went on talking about the treaty, and the Weasel's treason, and the assassination of the ambassador. The Owl, sitting close by, heard all these things, and after a time came to understand what the hawk meant; at first he could not believe that his master, the king, would conclude a treaty without first consulting him, but looking

underneath him he saw the feathers of the thrush scattered on the grass, and could no longer doubt that what the hawk said was true.

But when he heard the story of Ki Ki's promised treason on the day of battle, when he heard that the Weasel had betrayed the secret of the spring, which did not freeze in winter, he lifted up his claw and opened his eyes still wider in amazement and terror. "Wretched creature!" he said, "what is this you have been saying." But the hawk, quite mad with agony, did not know him, but mistook him for Ki Ki, and poured out such terrible denunciations that the Owl, shocked beyond measure, flew away.

As he went, after he had gone some distance under the trees, and could no longer hear the ravings of the tortured hawk, he began to ask himself what he had better do. At first he thought that he would say nothing, but take measures to defeat these traitors. But presently it occurred to him that it was dangerous even to know such things, and he wished that he had never heard what the hawk had said. He reflected, too, that the bats had been flying about some time, and might have heard the hawk's confessions, and although they were not admitted at court, as they

belonged to the lower orders, still under such circumstances they might obtain an audience. They had always borne him ill-will, they must have seen him, and it was not unlikely they might say that the Owl knew all about it, and kept it from the king. On the other hand he thought that Kapchack's rage would be terrible to face.

Upon the whole, however, the Owl came to the conclusion that his safest, as well as his most honourable course, was to go straight to the king, late as it was, and communicate all that had thus come to his knowledge. He set out at once, and upon his way again passed the glade, taking care not to go too near the dead oak, nor to look towards the suspended hawk. He saw a nightjar, like a ghost wheeling to and fro not far from the scaffold, and anxious to get from the ill-omened spot, flew yet more swiftly. Round the wood he went, and along the hedges, so occupied with his thoughts that he did not notice how the sky was covered with clouds, and once or twice narrowly escaping a branch blown off by the wind which had risen to a gale. Nor did he see the Fox with his brush touching the ground, creeping unhappily along the

mound, but never looked to the right nor left, hastening as fast as he could glide to king Kapchack.

Now the king had waited up that night as long as ever he could, wondering why the thrush did not return, and growing more and more anxious about the ambassador every moment. Yet he was unable to imagine what could delay him, nor could he see how any ill could befall him, protected as he was by the privileges of his office. As the night came on, and the ambassador did not come, Kapchack, worn out with anxieties, snapped at his attendants, who retired to a little distance, for they feared the monarch in these fits of temper.

Kapchack had just fallen asleep when the Owl arrived, and the attendants objected to letting him see the king. But the Owl insisted, saying that it was his particular privilege as chief secretary of state to be admitted to audience at any moment. With some difficulty, therefore, he at last got to the king, who woke up in a rage, and stormed at his faithful counsellor with such fury that the attendants again retired in affright. But the Owl stood his ground and told his tale.

When King Kapchack heard that his ambassador had been foully assassinated, and that, therefore, the treaty was at an end—for Choo Hoo would never brook such an affront; when he heard that Ki Ki, his trusted Ki Ki, who had the command, had offered to retreat in the hour of battle, and expose him to be taken prisoner; when he heard that the Weasel, the Weasel whom that very afternoon he had restored to his highest favour, had revealed to the enemy the existence of the spring, he lost all his spirit, and he knew not what to do. He waved the Owl from his presence, and sat alone hanging his head, utterly overcome.

The clouds grew darker, the wind howled, the trees creaked, and the branches cracked (the snail had foreseen the storm and had ventured forth on the wall), a few spots of rain came driving along. Kapchack heard nothing. He was deserted by all: all had turned traitors against him, every one. He who had himself deceived all was now deceived by all, and suffered the keenest pangs. Thus, in dolour and despair the darkness increased, and the tempest howled about him.

CHAPTER III.

THE STORM IN THE NIGHT.

When the fox, after humbling himself in the dust, was rudely dismissed by king Kapchack, he was so mortified, that as he slunk away his brush touched the ground, and the tip of his nostrils turned almost white. That he, whose ancestors had once held regal dignity, should thus be contemned by one who in comparison was a mere upstart, and that, too, after doing him a service by means of the gnat, and after bowing himself, as it were, to the ground, hurt him to his soul. He went away through the fern and the bushes to his lair in the long grass which grew in a corner of the copse, and having curled himself up, tried to forget the insult in slumber.

But he could not shut his eyes, and after a while he went off again down the hedgerow to another place where he sometimes stayed, under thick brambles on a broad mound. But he could not rest there, nor in the osier-bed, nor in the furze,

but he kept moving from place to place all day, contrary to his custom, and not without running great danger. The sting lingered in him, and the more so because he felt that it was true—he knew himself that he had not shown any ability lately. Slowly the long day passed, the shadows lengthened and it became night. Still restlessly and aimlessly wandering he went about the fields noticing nothing but miserable to the last degree. The Owl flew by on his errand to king Kapehack: the bats fluttered overhead; the wind blew and the trees creaked, but the Fox neither saw, nor heard, nor thought of anything except his own degradation. He had been cast forth as unworthy—even the very Mouse had received some instructions, but he, the descendant of illustrious ancestors, was pointedly told that the wit for which they had been famous did not exist in him.

As the night drew on, the wind rose higher, the clouds became thicker and darker, the branches crashed to the earth, the tempest rushed along bearing everything before it. The owls, alarmed for their safety, hid in the hollow trees, or retired to their barns; the bats retreated into the crevices of the tiles;

nothing was abroad but the wildfowl, whose cries occasionally resounded overhead. Now and then, the fall of some branch into a hawthorn bush frightened the sleeping thrushes and blackbirds, who flew forth into the darkness, not knowing whither they were going. The rabbits crouched on the sheltered side of the hedges, and then went back into their holes. The larks cowered closer to the earth.

Ruin and destruction raged around: in Choo Hoo's camp the ash poles beat against each other, oaks were rent, and his vast army knew no sleep that night. Whirled about by the fearful gusts, the dying hawk, suspended from the trap, no longer fluttered, but swung unconscious to and fro. The feathers of the murdered thrush were scattered afar, and the leaves torn from the boughs went sweeping after them. Alone in the scene the Fox raced along, something of the wildness of the night entered into him; he tried, by putting forth his utmost speed, to throw off the sense of ignominy.

In the darkness, and in his distress of mind, he neither knew nor cared whither he was going. He passed the shore of the Longpond, and heard the waves dashing on the stones, and felt the spray

driven far up on the sward. He passed the miserable hawk. He ran like the wind by the camp of Choo Hoo, and heard the hum of the army, unable to sleep. Weary, at last, he sought for some spot into which to drag his limbs, and crept along a mound which, although he did not recognise it in his stupefied state of mind, was really not far from where he had started. As he was creeping along he fancied he heard a voice which came from the ground beneath his feet; it sounded so strange in the darkness that he started and stayed to listen.

He heard it again, but though he thought he knew the voices of all the residents in the field, he could not tell who it was, nor whence it came. But after a time he found that it proceeded from the lower part or butt of an elm tree. This tree was very large, and seemed perfectly sound, but it seems there was a crack in it, whether caused by lightning or not he did not know, which did not show at ordinary times. But when the wind blew extremely strong as it did to-night, the tree leant over before the blast, and thus opened the crack. The Fox, listening at the crack, heard the voice lamenting the long years that had passed, the dark-

ness and the dreary time, and imploring every species of vengeance upon the head of the cruel king Kapchack.

After a while the Fox came to the conclusion that this must be the toad who, very many years ago, for some offence committed against the state, was imprisoned by Kapchack's orders in the butt of an elm, there to remain till the end of the world. Curious to know why the toad had been punished in this terrible manner, the Fox resolved to speak to the prisoner, from whom perhaps he might learn something to Kapchack's disadvantage. Waiting, therefore, till the crack opened as the gust came, the Fox spoke into it, and the toad, only too delighted to get some one to talk to at last, replied directly.

But the chink was so small that his voice was scarcely audible; the chink, too, only opened for a second or two during the savage puffs of the gale, and then closed again, so that connected conversation was not possible, and all the Fox heard was that the toad had some very important things to say. Anxious to learn these things, the Fox tried his hardest to discover some way of communicating with

the toad, and at last he hit upon a plan. He looked round till he found a little bit of flint, which he picked up, and when the elm bent over before the gale, and the chink opened, he pushed the splinter of flint into the crevice.

Then he found another piece of flint just a trifle larger, and, watching his opportunity, thrust it in. This he did three or four times, each time putting in a larger wedge, till there was a crack sufficiently open to allow him to talk to the toad easily. The toad said that this was the first time he had spoken to anybody since his grandson, who lived in the rhubarb patch, came to exchange a word with him before the butt of the tree grew quite round him.

But though the Fox plied him with questions, and persuaded him in every way, he would not reveal the reason why he was imprisoned, except that he had unluckily seen Kapchack do something. He dared not say what it was, because if he did he had no doubt he would be immediately put to death, and although life in the tree was no more than a living death, still it was life, and he had this consolation, that through being debarred from

all exercise and work, and compelled to exist without eating or drinking, notwithstanding the time passed and the years went by, still he did not grow any older. He was as young now as when he was first put into the dungeon, and if he could once get out, he felt that he should soon recover the use of his limbs, and should crawl about and enjoy himself when his grandson who lived in the rhubarb patch, and who was already very old and warty, was dead.

Indeed by being thus shut up he should survive every other toad, and he hoped some day to get out, because although he had been condemned to imprisonment till the end of the world, that was only Kapchack's vain-glorious way of pronouncing sentence, as if his (Kapchack's) authority was going to endure for ever, which was quite contrary to history and the teachings of philosophy. So far from that he did not believe himself that Kapchack's dynasty was fated to endure very long, for since he had been a prisoner immured in the earth, he had heard many strange things whispered along underground, and among them a saying about Kapchack. Besides which he knew that the elm tree could not exist for

ever; already there was a crack in it, which in time would split further up; the elm had reached its prime, and was beginning to decay within. By-and-by it would be blown over, and then the farmer would have the butt grubbed up, and split for firewood, and he should escape. It was true it might be many years hence, perhaps a century, but that did not matter in the least—time was nothing to him now—and he knew he should emerge as young as when he went in.

This was the reason why he so carefully kept the secret of what he had seen, so as to preserve his life; nor could the Fox by any persuasion prevail upon him to disclose the matter.

"But at least," said the Fox, "at least tell me the saying you have heard underground about king Kapchack."

"I am afraid to do so," said the toad; "for having already suffered so much I dread the infliction of further misery."

"If you will tell me," said the Fox, "I will do my very best to get you out. I will keep putting in wedges till the tree splits wide open, so that you may crawl up the chink."

"Will you," said the toad, excited at the hope of liberty, "will you really do that?"

"Yes, that I will," said the Fox, "wait an instant, and I will fetch another flint."

So he brought another flint, which split the tree so much, that the toad felt the fresh air come down to him. "And you really will do it?" he said.

"Yes," repeated the Fox, "I will certainly let you out."

"Then," said the toad, "the saying I have heard underground is this: 'When the hare hunts the hunter in the dead day, the hours of king Kapchack are numbered.' It is a curious and a difficult saying, for I cannot myself understand how the day could be dead, nor how the hare could chase the sportsman; but you, who have so high a reputation for sagacity, can no doubt in time interpret it. Now put in some more wedges and help me out."

But the Fox having learnt all that the toad could tell him, went away, and finding the osiers, curled himself up to sleep.

The same night, the Weasel, having had a very pleasant nap upon his divan in the elm in the Squirrel's copse, woke up soon after midnight, and started for

the farm, in order to enjoy the pleasure of seeing the Rat in the gin, which he had instructed Bevis how to set up. Had it not been for this he would not have faced so terrible a tempest, but to see the Rat in torture he would have gone through anything. As he crept along a furrow, not far outside the copse, choosing that route that he might be somewhat sheltered in the hollow from the wind, he saw a wire which a poacher had set up, and stayed to consider how he could turn it to his advantage.

"There is Ulu, the Hare," he said to himself, "who lives in the wheat-field; I had her son, he was very sweet and tender, and also her nephew, who was not so juicy, and I have noticed that she has got very plump of late. She is up on the hill to-night I have no doubt, notwithstanding the tempest, dancing and flirting with her disreputable companions, for vice has such an attraction for some minds that they cannot forego its pleasures, even at the utmost personal inconvenience. Such revels, at such a time of tempest, while the wrath of Heaven is wreaked upon the trees, are nothing short of sacrilege, and I for one have always set my mind against irreverence. I shall do the world a service if I rid it of such an abandoned

creature." So he called to a moorhen, who was flying over from the Longpond at a tremendous pace, being carried before the wind, and the moorhen, not without a great deal of trouble, managed to wheel round (she was never very clever with her wings) to receive his commands, for she did not dare to pass over, or slight so high a personage.

"Moorhen," said the Weasel; "do you go direct to the hills and find Ulu, the Hare, and tell her that little Sir Bevis, of whom she is so fond, is lost in the copse, and that he is crying bitterly because of the darkness and the wind, and what will become of him I do not know. I have done my very best to show him the way home, but he cherishes an unfortunate prejudice against me, and will not listen to what I say. Therefore if the Hare does not come immediately and show him the way I greatly fear that he will be knocked down by the branches, or cry his dear pretty darling heart out; and tell her that he is at this minute close to the birches. Go quickly, moorhen."

"I will, my lord," said the moorhen, and away she flew.

Then the Weasel proceeded on his way, and shortly afterwards arrived at the farm. As he came

quietly down from the rick-yard, he said to himself, "I will keep a good way from the wall, as it is so dark, and I do not know the exact place where Bevis has put the trap. Besides, it is just possible that the Rat may not yet have passed that way, for he does most of his business in the early morning, and it is not yet dawn."

So he crossed over to the wood-pile and listened carefully, but could hear no groans, as he had expected; but on consideration, he put this down to the wind, which he observed blew the sound away from him. He then slipped over to the grass by the cart-house wall, intending to listen at the mouth of the drain to hear if the Rat was within, and then if that was not the case, to go on along towards the wall of the pigstye, for he began to think the Rat must have been stunned by the trap, and so could not squeak.

If that was the case, he thought he would just bite off the end of the Rat's tail, in revenge for the terrible meal he had once been obliged to make upon his own, and also to wake up the Rat to the misery of his position. But just as he approached the mouth of the drain, sniffing and listening with

the utmost caution, it happened that a drop of rain fell through a chink in the top of Pan's tub, and woke him from his slumber. Pan shook himself and turned round, and the Weasel, hearing the disturbance, dreaded lest Pan was loose, and had caught scent of him. He darted forwards to get into the drain, when the trap, which the Bailiff had so carefully removed from where Bevis had set it, snapped him up in a second. The shock and the pain made him faint; he turned over and lay still.

About the same time the moorhen, borne swiftly along by the wind on her way to the river, reached the hills, and seeing the Hare, flew low down and delivered the Weasel's message as well as she could. The Hare was dreadfully alarmed about Sir Bevis, and anxious to relieve him from his fright in the dark copse, raced down the hill, and over the fields as fast as she could go, making towards that part of the copse where the birches stood, as the Weasel had directed, knowing that in running there she would find her neck in a noose.

It happened just as he had foreseen. She came along as fast as the wind, and could already see

the copse like a thicker darkness before her, when the loop of the wire drew up around her neck, and over she rolled in the furrow.

Now the Weasel had hoped that the wire would not hang her at once. He intended to have come back from the farm, and from taunting the Rat in the trap, in time to put his teeth into her veins, before, in her convulsive efforts to get free, she tightened the noose and died.

And this, too, happened exactly as the Weasel had intended, but in a different manner, and with a different result; for it had chanced that the wind, in the course of its ravages among the trees, snapped off a twig of ash, which rolling over and over before the blast along the sward, came against the stick which upheld the wire, and the end of the twig where it had broken from the tree lodged in the loop. Thus, when Ulu kicked, and struggled, and screamed, in her fear, the noose indeed drew up tight and half-strangled her, but not quite, because the little piece of wood prevented it. But, exhausted with pain and terror, and partially choked, the poor Hare at last could do nothing else but crouch down in the furrow, where the rain fell

on and soaked her warm coat of fur. For as the dawn came on the wind sunk, and the rain fell.

In this unhappy plight she passed the rest of the night, dreading every moment lest the Fox should come along (as she could not run away), and not less afraid of the daybreak, when some one would certainly find her.

After many weary hours, the Bailiff coming to his work in the morning with a sack over his shoulders to keep out the rain, saw something on the grass, and pounced upon the wretched Hare. Already his great thumb was against the back of her neck—already she was thrown across his knee —already she felt her sinews stretch, as he proceeded to break her neck, regardless of her shrieks —when suddenly it occurred to him how delighted Bevis would be with a living Hare. For the Bailiff was very fond of Bevis, and would have done anything to please him. So he took the Hare in his arms, and carried her down to the farm.

When Bevis got up and came to breakfast, the Bailiff came in and brought him the Hare, expecting that he would be highly pleased. But Bevis in an

instant recognised his friend who had shown him his way in the cowslips, and flew into a rage, and beat the Bailiff with his fist for his cruelty. Nothing would satisfy him but he must let the Hare go free before he touched his breakfast. He would not sit down, he stamped and made such a to-do that at last they let him have his own way.

He would not even allow the Bailiff to carry the Hare for him; he took her in his arms and went with her up the footpath into the field. He would not even permit them to follow him. Now, the Hare knew him very well but could not speak when any one else was near, for it is very well known to be a law among hares and birds, and such creatures, that they can only talk to one human being, and are dumb when more than one are present. But when Bevis had taken her out into the footpath, and set her down, and stroked her back, and her long ears, black at the tip, and had told her to go straight up the footpath, and not through the long grass, because it was wet with the rain, the Hare told him how she came in the wire through the wicked Weasel telling her that he was lost in the copse.

"I was not lost," said Bevis; "I went to bed, and saw the Owl go by. The Weasel told another of his stories—now, I remember, he told me to set the trap for the Rat."

"Did he?" said the Hare, "then you may depend it is some more of his dreadful wickedness; there will be no peace in the world while he is allowed to go roaming about."

"No," said Bevis, "that there will not: but as sure as my papa's gun, which is the best gun in the country, as sure as my papa's gun I will kill him the next time I see him. I will not listen to the Squirrel, I will cut the Weasel's tree down, and chop off his head."

"I hope you will, dear," said the Hare. "But now I must be gone, for I can hear Pan barking, and no doubt he can smell me, besides which, it is broad daylight, and I must go and hide; good-bye, my dear Sir Bevis." And away went the Hare up the footpath till Bevis lost sight of her through the gateway.

Then he went to his breakfast, and directly afterwards, putting on his great coat, for it still rained a little, he went up to the wall by the pig-

stye expecting to find the Rat in the trap. But the trap was gone.

"There now," said he, falling into another rage, twice already that morning; "I do believe that stupid Bailiff has moved it," and so the Bailiff trying to please him fell twice into disgrace in an hour.

Looking about to see where the Bailiff had put the trap, he remembered what the Weasel had told him, and going to the earthouse-wall by the drain, found the trap and the Weasel in it: "Oh! you false and treacherous creature!" said Bevis, picking up a stone, "now I will smash you into seventy thousand little pieces," and he flung the stone with all his might, but being in too much of a hurry (as the snail had warned him) it missed the mark, and only knocked a bit of mortar out of the wall. He looked round for a bigger one, so that he might crush the wretch this time, when the Weasel feebly lifted his head, and said, "Bevis! Bevis! It is not generous of you to bear such malice towards me now I am dying; you should rather ——"

"Hold your tongue, horrid thing," said Bevis, "I will not listen to anything you have to say. Here is a brick, this will do, first-rate, to pound you

with, and now I think of it, I will come a little nearer so as to make quite sure."

"Oh, Bevis!" said the Weasel with a gasp, "I shall be dead in a minute," and Bevis saw his head fall back.

"Tell the Hare I repented," said the Weasel. "I have been very wicked, Bevis—oh!—But I shall never, never do it any more—oh!"—

"Are you dead?" said Bevis. "Are you quite dead?" putting down the brick, for he could not bear to see anything in such distress, and his rage was over in a minute.

"I am," said the Weasel, "at least I shall be in half-a-minute, for I must be particular to tell the exact truth in this extremity. Oh! there is one thing I should like to say—"

"What is it?" said Bevis.

"But if you smash me I can't," said the Weasel, "and what is the use of smashing me, for all my bones are broken."

"I will not smash you," said Bevis, "I will only have you nailed up to the stable door so that everybody may see what a wretch you were."

"Thank you," said the Weasel very gratefully,

"will you please tell the Hare and all of them that if I could only live I would do everything I could to make up to them for all the wickedness I have committed—Oh!—I have not got time to say all I would. Oh! Bevis, Bevis!"

"Yes, poor thing," said Bevis, now quite melted and sorry for the wretched criminal, whose life was ebbing so fast, "what is it you want? I will be sure to do it."

"Then, dear Sir Bevis—how kind it is of you to forgive me, dear Sir Bevis; when I am dead do not nail me to the door—only think how terrible that would be—bury me dear."

"So I will," said Bevis; "but perhaps you needn't die. Stay a little while, and let us see if you cannot live."

"Oh, no," said the Weasel, "my time is come. But when I am dead, dear, please take me out of this cruel trap in which I am so justly caught, as I set it for another; take me out of this cruel trap which has broken my ribs, and lay me flat on the grass, and pull my limbs out straight, so that I may not stiffen all in a heap and crooked. Then get your spade, my dear Sir Bevis, and dig a hole and bury me,

and put a stone on top of me, so that Pan cannot scratch me up—Oh! Oh!—will you—Oh!"

"Yes, indeed I will. I will dig the hole—I have a capital spade," said Bevis; "stay a minute."

But the Weasel gave three gasps and fell back quite dead. Bevis looked at him a little while, and then put his foot on the spring and pressed it down and took the Weasel out. He stroked down his fur where the trap had ruffled it, and rubbed the earth from his poor paws with which he had struggled to get free, and then having chosen a spot close by the woodpile, where the ground was soft, to dig the hole, he put the Weasel down there, and pulled his limbs out straight, and so disposed him for the last sad ceremony. He then ran to the summer-house, which was not far, and having found the spade came back with it to the wood-pile. But the Weasel was gone.

There was the trap; there was the place he had chosen—all the little twigs and leaves brushed away ready for digging—but no Weasel. He was bewildered, when a robin perched on the top of the wood-pile, put his head on one side, and said so softly and sadly—"Bevis, Bevis, little Sir Bevis, what have you done?" For the Weasel was not dead, and was not even very

seriously injured; the trap was old, and the spring not very strong, and the teeth did not quite meet. If the Rat, who was fat, had got in, it would have pinched him dreadfully, but the Weasel was extremely thin, and so he escaped with a broken rib—the only true thing he had said.

So soon as ever Sir Bevis's back was turned, the Weasel crawled under the wood-pile, just as he had done once before, and from there made his way as quickly as he could up the field sheltered by the aftermath, which had now grown long again. When Bevis understood that the Weasel had only shammed dying, and had really got away, he burst into tears, for he could not bear to be cheated, and then threw his spade at the robin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD OAK.—THE KING'S DESPAIR.

The very same morning, after the rain had ceased, the keeper who looked after the great woods at the other end of the Longpond, set out with his gun and his dogs to walk round the preserves. Now the dogs he took with him were the very best dogs he had, for that night a young gentleman, who had just succeeded to the estate, was coming down from London, and on the following morning would be sure to go out shooting. This young gentleman had unexpectedly come into the property through the death of the owner, who was shot in his bedroom by a burglar. The robber had once been his groom, and the Squirrel told Bevis how it all happened through a flint falling out of the hole in the bottom of the waggon which belonged to the old farmer in whose orchard Kapchack had his palace.

The heir had been kept at a distance during the old gentleman's lifetime, for the old gentleman always

meant to marry and have a son, but did not do so, and also always meant to make a will and leave the best part of his estate to somebody else, but he did not do so, and as the old Toad in the rhubarb patch told Bevis afterwards when he heard the story, if you are only going to do a thing, it would be no use if you lived a thousand years, it would always be just the same. So the young fellow who had been poor all his life, when he thus suddenly jumped into such a property, was not a little elated, and wrote to the keeper that he should come down and have some shooting.

The keeper was rather alarmed at this, for the former owner was not a sporting man, and did not look strictly after such things, so that the game had been neglected and had got scarce, and what was worse the dogs were out of training. He therefore got up early that morning, intending to go his rounds quickly, and then take the dogs out into the stubble, and try and thrash them into some use. Presently, as he walked along, he came to the glade in the woods, and saw the dead hawk hanging from the trap up in the old oak tree. Pleased to find that his trap, so cunningly placed, had not been prepared in vain, he

went up to the oak, leaned his gun against the trunk, ordered the dogs to lie down (which they did with some reluctance), and then climbed up into the tree to re-set the gin.

He took the hawk from the trap (his feathers were all draggled and wet from the rain), and threw the dead bird down; and, whether it was that the act of throwing it caused an extra strain upon the bough, or whether the storm had cracked it in the night, or whether it had rotted away more than appeared on the surface, or whether it was all of these things together, certain it is the bough broke, and down came the keeper thud on the sward. The bough fell down with him, and as it fell it struck the gun, and the gun exploded, and although the dogs scampered aside when they heard the crack, they did not scamper so quick but one of them was shot dead, and the other two were mortally wounded.

For a while the keeper lay there stunned, with the wet grass against his face. But by-and-by, coming to himself, he sat up with difficulty, and called for assistance, for he could not move, having sprained one ankle, and broken the small bone of

the other leg. There he sat and shouted, but no one came for some time, till presently a slouching labourer (it was the very same who put up the wire by the copse in which the Hare was caught) chanced to pass by outside the wood. The keeper saw him, but hoarse with shouting, and feeling faint too (for a sprained ankle is extremely painful), he could not make him hear. But he bethought him of his gun, and dragging it to him, hastily put in a cartridge and fired.

The report drew the labourer's attention, and peering into the wood, he saw some one on the ground waving a white handkerchief. After looking a long time, he made up his mind to go and see what it was; but then he recollected that if he put his foot inside the wood he should be trespassing, and as he had got a wire in his pocket that would be a serious matter. So he altered his mind, and went on.

Very likely the keeper was angry, but there was no one to hear what he said except the dead hawk. He would have fired off fifty cartridges if he had had them, but as he did not like a weight to carry he had only two or three, and these did

not attract attention. As for the labourer, about midday, when he sat down to lunch in the cart-house at the farm where he worked with the other men, he did just mention that he thought he had seen something white waving in the wood, and they said it was odd, but very likely nothing to speak of.

One of the wounded dogs ran home, bleeding all the way, and there crept into his kennel and died; the other could not get so far, but dropped in a hedge. The keeper's wife wondered why he did not come home to dinner, but supposed, with a sigh, that he had looked in at the alehouse, and went on with her work.

The keeper shouted again when his throat got less hoarse, but all the answer he obtained was the echo from the wood. He tried to crawl, but the pain was so exquisite he got but a very little way, and there he had to lie. The sun rose higher and shone out as the clouds rolled away, and the rain-drops on the grass glistened bright till presently they dried up.

With the gleaming of the sun there was motion in the woods: blackbirds came forth and crossed

the glades; thrushes flew past; a jay fluttered round the tops of the firs; after a while a pheasant came along the verge of the underwood, now stepping out into the grass, and now back again into the bushes. There was a pleasant cawing of rooks, and several small parties of wood-pigeons (doubtless from Choo Hoo's camp) went over. Two or three rabbits hopped out and fed; humble-bees went buzzing by; a green woodpecker flashed across the glade and disappeared among the trees as if an arrow had been shot into the wood.

The slow hours went on, and as the sun grew hotter the keeper, unable to move, began to suffer from the fierceness of the rays, for anything still finds out the heat more than that which is in movement. First he lifted his hat from time to time above his head, but it was not much relief, as the wind had fallen. Next he tried placing his handkerchief inside his hat. At last he took off his coat, stuck the barrels of his gun into the ground (soft from the rain), and hung the coat upon it. This gave him a little shadow. The dead oak-tree having no leaves cast but a narrow shade, and that fell on the opposite side to where he was.

In the afternoon, when the heat was very great, and all the other birds appeared to have gone, a crow came (one of Kauc's retainers) and perched low down on an ash-tree not more than fifty yards away. Perhaps it was the dead dog; perhaps it was the knowledge that the man was helpless, that brought him. There he perched, and the keeper reviled him, wishing that he had but saved one of his cartridges, and forgetting that even then the barrels of his gun were too full of earth. After a while the crow flew idly across to the other side of the glade, and went out of sight; but it was only for a short time, and presently he came back again. This the crow did several times, always returning to the ash.

The keeper ran over in his mind the people who would probably miss him, and cause a search to be made. First there was his wife; but once, when he had been a long time from home, and she in a great alarm had sought for him, she found him drunk at the alehouse, and he beat her for her trouble. It was not likely that she would come. The lad who acted as his assistant (he had but one, for as previously stated, the former owner did not shoot)

was not likely to look for him either, for not long since, bringing a message to his superior, he discovered him selling some game, and was knocked down for his pains. As for his companions at the alehouse, they would be all out in the fields, and would not assemble till night: several of them he knew were poachers, and though glad enough to share his beer would not have looked towards him if in distress.

The slow hours wore on, and the sun declining a little, the shadow of the dead oak moved round, and together with his coat, sheltered him fairly well. Weary with the unwonted labour of thinking, the tension of his mind began to yield, and by and by he dropped asleep, lying at full length upon his back. The crow returned once more to the ash, and looked at the sleeping man and the dead dog, cleaned his beak against the bough, and uttered a low croak. Once he flew a little way out towards them, but there was the gun: it was true he knew very well there was no powder (for, in the first place, he could not smell any, and secondly, if there had been any, he knew he should have had the shot singing about his ears long before this; you see, he could put two and

two together), still there was the gun. The dog does not like the corner where the walking-stick stands. The crow did not like the gun, though it was stuck in the ground: he went back to the ash, cleaned his bill, and waited.

Something came stealthily through the grass, now stopping, now advancing with a creeping evil motion. It was the Weasel. When he stole away from the wood-pile, after escaping from the trap, he made up the field towards the copse, but upon reflection he determined to abandon his lair in the hollow elm, for he had so abused Bevis's good-nature that he doubted whether Bevis might not attack him even there despite the Squirrel. He did not know exactly where to go, knowing that every creature was in secret his enemy, and in his wounded state, unable to move quickly or properly defend himself, he dreaded to trust himself near them. After a while he remembered the old dead oak, which was also hollow within, and which was so far from the copse it was not probable Bevis would find it.

Thither he bent his painful steps, for his broken rib hurt him very much, and after many pauses to rest, presently, in the afternoon, he came near.

Lifting his head above the grass he saw the dead dog, and the sleeping keeper; he watched them a long time, and seeing that neither of them moved he advanced closer. As he approached he saw the dead hawk, and recognised one of Ki Ki's retainers; then coming to the dog the blood from the shot wounds excited his terrible thirst. But it had ceased to flow; he sniffed at it and then went towards the man.

The crow envious, but afraid to join the venture, watched him from the ash. Every few inches the Weasel stayed, lifted his head; looked, and listened. Then he advanced again, paused, and again approached. In five minutes he had reached the keeper's feet; two minutes more and he was by his waist. He listened again; he sniffed, he knew it was dangerous, but he could not check the resistless prompting of his appetite.

He crept up on the keeper's chest; the crow fidgetted on the ash. He crept up to the necktie; the crow came down on a lower bough. He moved yet another inch to the collar; the crow flew out ten yards and settled on the ground. The collar was stiff, and partly covered that part of the neck which

fascinated the Weasel's gaze. He put his foot softly on the collar; the crow hopped thrice towards them. He brought up his other foot, he sniffed—the breath came warm from the man's half-open lips—he adventured the risk, and placed his paw on the keeper's neck.

Instantly—as if he had received an electric shock—the keeper started to his knees, shuddering; the Weasel dropped from his neck upon the ground, the crow hastened back to the ash. With a blow of his open hand the keeper knocked the Weasel yards away; then, in his rage and fear, with whitened face, he wished instead he had beaten the creature down upon the earth, for, the Weasel, despite the grinding of his broken rib, began to crawl off, and he could not reach him.

He looked round for a stick or stone, there was none; he put his hand in his pocket, but his knife had slipped out when he fell from the tree. He passed his hands over his waistcoat seeking for something, felt his watch—a heavy silver one—and in his fury snatched it from the swivel, and hurled it at the Weasel. The watch thrown with such force missed the Weasel, struck the sward, and

bounded up against the oak: the glass shivered and flew sparkling a second in the sunshine; the watch glanced aside, and dropped in the grass. When he looked again the Weasel had gone. It was an hour before the keeper recovered himself—the shuddering terror with which he woke up haunted him in the broad daylight.

An intolerable thirst now tormented him, but the furrow was dry. In the morning, he remembered it had contained a little water from the rain, which during the day had sunk into the earth. He picked a bennet from the grass and bit it, but it was sapless, dried by the summer heat. He looked for a leaf of sorrel, but there was none. The slow hours wore on; the sun sank below the wood, and the long shadows stretched out. By-and-by the grass became cooler to the touch; dew was forming upon it. Overhead the rooks streamed homewards to their roosting trees. They cawed incessantly as they flew; they were talking about Kapchack and Choo Hoo, but he did not understand them.

The shadows reached across the glade, and yonder the rabbits appeared again from among the bushes

where their burrows were. He began now to seriously think that he should have to pass the night there. His ankle was swollen, and the pain almost beyond endurance. The slightest attempt at motion caused intense agony. His one hope now was that the same slouching labourer who had passed in the morning would go back that way at night; but as the shadows deepened that hope departed, and he doubted too whether any one could see him through the underwood in the dark. The slouching labourer purposely avoided that route home. He did not want to see anything, if anything there was.

He went round by the high road, and having had his supper, and given his wife a clout in the head, he sauntered down to the alehouse. After he had taken three quarts of beer, he mentioned the curious incident of the white handkerchief in the wood to his mates, who congratulated him on his sense in refraining from going near it, as most likely it was one of that keeper's tricks, just to get somebody into the wood. More talk, and more beer. By-and-by the keeper's wife began to feel alarmed. She had already found the dead dog in the kennel; but that did not surprise her in the

least, knowing her husband's temper, and that if a dog disobeyed, it was not at all unusual for a cartridge to go whistling after him.

But when the evening came, and the darkness fell; when she had gone down to the alehouse, braving his wrath, and found that he was not there, the woman began to get hysterical. The lad who acted as assistant had gone home, so she went out into the nearest stubble herself, thinking that her husband must have finished his round before lunch, and was somewhere in the newly-reaped fields. But after walking about the rustling stubble till she was weary, she came back to the alehouse, and begged the men to tell her if they had seen anything of him. Then they told her about the white handkerchief which the slouching poacher had seen in the wood that morning. She turned on him like a tiger, and fiercely upbraided him; then rushed from the house. The sloucher took up his quart, and said that he saw "no call" to hurry.

But some of the men went after the wife. The keeper was found, and brought home on a cart, but not before he had seen the owl go by, and the dark speck of the bat passing to and fro over head.

All that day Bevis did not go to the copse, being much upset with the cheat the Weasel had played him, and also because they said the grass and the hedges would be so wet after the storm. Nor did anything take place in the copse, for king Kapchack moped in his fortress, the orchard, the whole day long, so greatly was he depressed by the wide-spread treason of which the Owl had informed him.

Choo Hoo, thinking that the treaty was concluded, relaxed the strictness of discipline, and permitted his army to spread abroad from the camp and forage for themselves. He expected the return of the ambassador with further communications, and ordered search to be made for every dainty for his entertainment; while the thrush, for whom this care was taken, had not only ceased to exist, but it would have been impossible to collect his feathers, blown away to every quarter.

The vast horde of barbarians were the more pleased with the liberty accorded to them, because they had spent so ill a night while the gale raged through their camp. So soon as the sun began to gleam through the retreating clouds, they went forth

in small parties, many of which the keeper saw go over him while lying helpless by the dead oak-tree.

King Kapchack, after the Owl had informed him of the bewildering maze of treason with which he was surrounded, moped, as has been said before, upon his perch. In the morning, wet and draggled from the storm, his feathers out of place, and without the spirit to arrange them, he seemed to have grown twenty years older in one night, so pitiable did he appear. Nor did the glowing sun, which filled all other hearts with joy, reach his gloomy soul. He saw no resource ; no enterprise suggested itself to him ; all was dark at noonday.

An ominous accident which had befallen the aged apple-tree in which his palace stood contributed to this depression of mind. The gale had cracked a very large bough, which, having shown signs of weakness, had for many years been supported by a prop carefully put up by the farmer. But whether the prop in course of time had decayed at the line where the air and earth exercise their corroding influence upon wood; or whether the bough had stiffened with age, and could not swing easily to

the wind; or whether, as seems most likely, the event occurred at that juncture in order to indicate the course of fate, it is certain that the huge bough was torn partly away from the trunk, leaving a gaping cavity.

Kapchack viewed this injury to the tree, which had so long sustained his family and fortune, with the utmost concern; it seemed an omen of approaching destruction so plain and unmistakeable that he could not look at it; he turned his mournful gaze in the opposite direction. The day passed slowly, as slowly as it did to the keeper lying beneath the oak, and the king, though he would have resented intrusion with the sharpest language, noticed with an increasing sense of wrong that the court was deserted, and, with one exception, none called to pay their respects.

The exception was Eric, the favourite missel-thrush, who alone of all the larger birds was allowed to frequent the same orchard. The missel-thrush, loyal to the last, came, but seeing Kapchack's condition, did not endeavour to enter into conversation. As for the rest, they did not venture from fear of the king's violent temper, and because their unquiet

consciences made them suspect that this unusual depression was caused by the discovery of their treachery. They remained away from dread of his anger. Kapchack, on the other hand, put their absence down to the mean and contemptible desire to avoid a falling house. He observed that even the little Te-te, the tomtit, and chief of the secret police, who invariably came twice or thrice a day with an account of some gossip he had overheard, did not arrive. How low he must have fallen, since the common informers disdained to associate with him!

Towards the evening he sent for his son, Prince Tchack-tchack, with the intention of abdicating in his favour, but what were his feelings when the messenger returned without him! Tchack-tchack refused to come. He, too, had turned away. Thus, deserted by the lovely La Schach, for whom he had risked his throne; deserted by the whole court and even by his own son; the monarch welcomed the darkness of the night, the second of his misery, which hid his disgrace from the world.

The Owl came, faithful by night as the Missel-thrush by day, but Kapchack, in the deepest despon-

dency, could not reply to his remarks. Twice the Owl came back, hoping to find his master somewhat more open to consolation, and twice had to depart unsuccessful. At last, about midnight, the king, worn out with grief, fell asleep.

Now the same evening the Hare, who was upon the hills as usual, as she came by a barn overheard some bats who lived there conversing about the news which they had learnt from their relations who resided in the woods of the vale. This was nothing less than the revelations the dying hawk had made of the treacherous designs of Ki Ki and the Weasel, which, as the Owl had suspected, had been partly overheard by the bats. The Hare, in other circumstances, would have rejoiced at the overthrow of king Kapchack, who was no favourite with her race, for he had, once or twice, out of wanton cruelty, pecked weakly leverets to death, just to try the temper of his bill. But she dreaded lest if he were thrust down the Weasel should seize the sovereignty, the Weasel, who had already done her so much injury, and was capable of ruining not only herself but her whole nation if once he got the supreme power.

Not knowing what to do herself for the best, away she went down the valley and over the steep ridges in search of a very old hare, quite hoar with age—an astrologer of great reputation in those parts. For the hares have always been good star-gazers, and the whole race of them, one and all, are not without skill in the mystic sciences, while some are highly charged with knowledge of futurity, and have decided the fate of mighty battles by the mere direction in which they scampered. The old hare no sooner heard her information than he proceeded to consult the stars, which shone with exceeding brilliance that night, as they often do when the air has been cleared by a storm, and finding, upon taking accurate observations, that the house of Jupiter was threatened by the approach of Saturn to the meridian, he had no difficulty in pronouncing the present time as full of danger and big with fate.

The planets were clearly in combination against king Kapchack, who must, if he desired to avoid extinction, avoid all risks, and hide his head, as it were, in a corner till the aspect of the heavens changed. Above all things let him not make war or go forth himself into the combat; let him conclude peace, or

at least enter into a truce, no matter at what loss of dignity, or how much territory he had to concede to conciliate Choo Hoo. His person was threatened, the knife was pointed at his heart, could he but wait awhile, and tide as it were over the shallows, he might yet resume the full sway of power; but if he exposed his life at this crisis the whole fabric of his kingdom might crumble beneath his feet.

Having thus spoken, the hoary astrologer went off in the direction of Stonehenge, whose stones formed his astrolabe, and the Hare, much excited with the communication she had received (confirmed as it was to by the facts of the case) resolved to at once warn the monarch of his danger. Calling a beetle, she charged him with a message to the king:—That he should listen to the voice of the stars, and conclude peace at no matter what cost, or at least a truce, submitting to be deprived of territory, or treasure to any amount or extent, and that above all things he should not venture forth personally to the combat. If he hearkened he would yet reign; if he closed his ears the evil influence which then threatened him must have its way. Strictly enjoining the beetle to make haste, and turn neither to the right nor the left, but

to speed straight away for the palace, she dismissed him.

The beetle, much pleased to be employed upon so important a business, opened his wing-cases, began to hum, and increasing his pace as he went, flew off at his utmost velocity. He passed safely over the hills, descended into the valley, sped across the fields and woods, and in an incredibly short space of time, approached the goal of his journey. The wall of the orchard was in sight, he began to repeat his message to himself, so as to be sure and not miss a word of it, when going at this tremendous pace, and as usual, without looking in front, but blundering onwards, he flew with his whole force against a post. His body, crushed by the impetus of its own weight, rebounded with a snop, and he fell disabled and insensible to the earth.

CHAPTER V.

THE COURTSHIP IN THE ORCHARD.

THE next morning Bevis's papa looking at the almanac found there was going to be an eclipse of the sun, so Bevis took a piece of glass (part of one of the many window panes he had broken) and smoked it over a candle, so as to be able to watch the phenomenon without injury to his eyes. When the obscuration began too, the dairymaid brought him a bucket of clear water in which the sun was reflected and could be distinctly seen. But before the eclipse had proceeded beyond the mere edge of the sun, Bevis heard the champing of a bit, and the impatient pawing of hoofs, and running up to the stable to see who it was, found that his papa was just on the point of driving over in the dog-cart to see another farmer (the very old gentleman in whose orchard Kapchack's palace was situated) about a load of straw.

Bevis of course insisted upon going too, the smoked glass was thrown aside, he clambered up and held the

reins, and away they went, the eclipse now counting for nothing. After a while, however, as they went swiftly along the road, they came to a hill, and from the summit saw a long way off a vast shadow like that cast by some immense cloud which came towards them over the earth, and in a second or two arrived, and as it were, put out the light. They looked up and the sun was almost gone. In its place was a dark body with a rim of light round it, and flames shooting forth.

As they came slowly down the hill a pheasant crowed as he flew up to roost, the little birds retired to the thickets, and at the farmyards they passed the fowls went up to their perches. Presently they left the highway and drove along a lane across the fields, which had once been divided from each other by gates. Of these there was nothing now standing but the posts, some of which could hardly be said to stand, but declining from the perpendicular, were only kept from falling by the bushes. The lane was so rough and so bad from want of mending that they could only walk the impatient horse, and at times the jolting was extremely unpleasant.

Sometimes they had to stoop down in the trap

to pass under the drooping boughs of elms and other trees, which not having been cut for years, hung over and almost blocked the track. From the hedges the brambles and briars extended out into the road, so that the wheels of the dog-cart brushed them, and they would evidently have entirely shut up the way had not waggons occasionally gone through and crushed their runners. The meadows on either hand were brown with grass that had not been mown, though the time for mowing had long since gone by, while the pastures were thick with rushes and thistles. Though so extensive there were only two or three cows in them, and these old and poor, and as it were, broken-down. No horses were visible, nor any men at work.

There were other fields which had once grown wheat, but were now so choked with weeds as to be nothing but a wilderness. As they approached the farmhouse where the old gentleman dwelt, the signs of desolation became more numerous. There were walls that had fallen, and never been repaired, around whose ruins the nettles flourished. There were holes in the roofs of the sheds exposing the rafters.

Trees had fallen and lay as they fell, rotting

away, and not even cut up for firewood. Railings had decayed till there was nothing left but a few stumps; gates had dropped from their hinges, and nothing of them remained but small bits of rotten board attached to rusty irons. In the garden all was confusion, the thistles rose higher than the gooseberry bushes, and burdocks looked in at the windows. From the wall of the house a pear that had been trained there had fallen away, and hung suspended, swinging with every puff; the boughs, driven against the windows, had broken the panes in the adjacent casement; other panes which had been broken were stuffed up with wisps of hay.

Tiles had slipped from the roof, and the birds went in and out as they listed. The remnants of the tiles lay cracked upon the ground beneath the eaves just as they had fallen. No hand had touched them; the hand of man indeed had touched nothing. Bevis, whose eyes were everywhere, saw all these things in a minute. "Why," said he, "there's the knocker; it has tumbled down." It had dropped from the door as the screws rusted; the door itself was propped up with a log of wood. But one thing only appeared to have been attended to, and that

was the wall about the orchard, which showed traces of recent mortar, and the road leading towards it, which had not long since been mended with flints.

Now Bevis, as I say, noting all these things as they came near with his eyes, which, like gimlets, went through everything, was continually asking his papa questions about them, and why everything was in such a state, till at last his papa, overwhelmed with his enquiries, promised to tell him the whole story when they got home. This he did, but while they are now fastening up the horse (for there was no one to help them or mind it), and while Bevis is picking up the rusty knocker, the story may come in here very well:—

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, when the old gentleman was young, and lived with his mother at the farmhouse, it happened that he fell in love. The lady he loved was very young, very beautiful, very proud, very capricious, and very poor. She lived in a house in the village little better than a cottage, with an old woman who was said to be her aunt. As the young farmer was well off, for the land was his own, and he had no one to keep but his old mother, and as the young lady dearly

loved him, there seemed no possible obstacle in their way. But it is well known that a brook can never run straight, and thus, though all looked so smooth, there were, in reality, two difficulties.

The first of these was the farmer's old mother, who having been mistress in the farmhouse for very nearly fifty years, did not like, after half a century, to give place to a mere girl. She could not refrain from uttering disparaging remarks about her, to which her son, being fond of his mother, could not reply, though it angered him to the heart, and at such times he used to take down his long single-barrelled gun with brass fittings, and go out shooting. More than once the jealous mother had insulted the young lady openly in the village street, which conduct, of course, as things fly from roof to roof with the sparrows, was known all over the place, and caused the lady to toss her head like a filly in spring to show that she did not care for such an old harridan, though in secret it hurt her pride beyond expression.

So great was the difficulty this caused, that the young lady, notwithstanding she was so fond of the handsome young farmer, who rode so well and shot so straight, and could carry her in his arms as if

she were no more than a lamb, would never put her dainty foot, which looked so little and pretty even in the rude shoes made for her by the village cobbler, over the threshold of his house. She would never come in, she said, except as a wife, while he on his part, anxious as he was to marry her, could not, from affection for his mother, summon up courage to bring her in, as it were, rough-shod over his mother's feelings.

Their meetings, therefore, as she would not come indoors, were always held in the farmer's orchard, where was a seat in an arbour, a few yards in front of which stood the ancient apple-tree in which Kapchack, who was also very young in those days, had built his nest. At this arbour they met every day, and often twice a day, and even once again in the evening, and could there chat and make love as sweetly as they pleased, because the orchard was enclosed by a high wall which quite shut out all spying eyes, and had a gate with lock and key. The young lady had a duplicate key, and came straight to the orchard from the cottage where she lived by a footpath which crossed the lane along which Bevis had been driven.

It happened that the footpath just by the lane, on coming near the orchard, passed a moist place, which in rainy weather was liable to be flooded, and as this was inconvenient for her, her lover had a waggon-load of flints brought down from the hills where the hares held their revels, and placed in the hollow so as to fill it up, and over these he placed faggots of nut-tree wood, so that she could step across perfectly clean and dry. In this orchard, then, they had their constant rendezvous; they were there every day when the nightingale first began to sing in the spring, and when the apple-trees were hidden with their pink blossom, when the haymakers were at work in the meadow, when the reapers cut the corn, and when the call of the first fieldfare sounded overhead. The golden and rosy apples dropped at their feet, they laughed and ate them, and taking out the brown pips she pressed them between her thumb and finger to see how far they would shoot.

Though they had begun to talk about their affairs in the spring, and had kept on all the summer and autumn, and though they kept on as often as the weather was dry (when they walked up and

down the long orchard for warmth, sheltered by the wall), yet when the spring came again they had not half finished. Thus they were very happy, and the lady used particularly to laugh at the antics of the magpie, who became so accustomed to their presence as to go on with the repairs to his nest without the least shyness. Kapchack, being then very young and full of spirits, and only just married, and in the honeymoon of prosperity played such freaks, and behaved in so amusing a manner that the lady became quite attached to him, and in order to protect her favourite, her lover drove away all the other large birds that came near the orchard, and would not permit any one whatever to get up into Kapchack's apple-tree, nor even to gather the fruit, which hung on the boughs till the wind pushed it off.

Thus, having a fortress to retreat to, and being so highly honoured of men, Kapchack gave the reins to his natural audacity, and succeeded in obtaining the sovereignty. When the spring came again they had still a great deal of talking to do; but whether the young lady was weary of waiting for the marriage-ring, or whether she was jealous

of the farmer's mother, or whether she thought they might continue like this for the next ten years if she did not make some effort, or whether it was the worldly counsels of her aunt, or what it was—perhaps her own capricious nature, it is certain that they now began to quarrel a little about another gentleman.

This gentleman was very rich, and the owner of a large estate in the neighbourhood; he did not often reside there, for he did not care for sport or country life, but once when he came down he happened to see the young lady, and was much attracted towards her. Doubtless she did not mean any harm, but she could not help liking people to admire her, and, not to go into every little particular, in the course of time (and not very long either) she and the gentleman became acquainted. Now, when her own true lover was aware of this, he was so jealous that he swore if ever he saw them together he would shoot his rival with his long-barrelled gun, though he were hung for it the next day.

The lady was not a little pleased at this frantic passion, and secretly liked him ten times better for it, though she immediately resorted to every artifice

to calm his anger, for she knew his violent nature, and that he was quite capable of doing as he had said. But the delight of two strings to her bow was not easily to be foregone, and thus, though she really loved the farmer, she did not discourage the gentleman. He, on his part, finding after a while that although she allowed him to talk to her, and even to visit her at the cottage, and sometimes (when she knew the young farmer was at market) go for a walk with him, and once even came and went over his grand mansion, still finding that it was all talk, and that his suit got no further, he presently bethought him of diamonds.

He gave her a most beautiful diamond locket, which he had had down all fresh and brilliant from London. Now this was the beginning of the mischief. She accepted it in a moment of folly, and wished afterwards ten times that she had refused, but having once put it on, it looked so lovely she could not send it back. She could not openly wear it, lest her lover should see it, but every morning she put it on indoors, and frequently glanced in the glass.

Nor is it any use to find fault with her; for

in the first place she has been dead many years, and in the second she was then very young, very beautiful, and living quite alone in the world with an old woman. Now her lover, notwithstanding the sweet assurances she gave him of her faithfulfulness, and despite the soft kisses he had in abundance every day in the orchard, soft as the bloom of the apple-trees, could not quite recover his peace of mind. He did not laugh as he used to do. He was restless, and the oneness of his mind was gone. Oneness of mind does not often last long into life, but while it lasts everything is bright. He had now always a second thought, a doubt behind, which clouded his face and brought a line into his forehead.

After a time his mother observing his depression, began to accuse herself of unkindness, and at last resolved to stand no longer in the way of the marriage. She determined to quit the house in which she had lived ever since she came to it a happy bride half-a-century before. Having made up her mind, that very morning she walked along the footpath to the young lady's cottage, intending to atone for her former unkindness, and to bring

the girl back to lunch, and thus surprise her son when he came in from the field.

She had even made up her mind to put up with the cold reception she would probably meet with, nor to reply if any hard words were used towards her. Thus thinking, she lifted the latch, as country people do not use much ceremony, and stepped into the cottage, when what was her surprise to find the girl she had come to see with a beautiful diamond locket about her neck, gleaming in the sunshine from the open door! She instantly understood what it meant, and upbraiding the girl with her falseness, quitted the place, and lost no time in telling her son, but first she took the precaution of hiding his gun. As he could not find that weapon, after the first storm of his jealous anger had gone over he shut himself up in his room.

The lady came the same evening to the rendezvous in the orchard, but her lover did not meet her. She came again next day, and in the evening; and again the third day, and so all through the week, and for nearly a month doing all she could without actually entering the house to get access

to him. But he sullenly avoided her; once seeing her in the road, he leaped his horse over the hedge rather than pass her. For the diamond locket looked so like a price—as if she valued a glittering bauble far above true love.

At last one day she surprised him at the corner of the village street, and notwithstanding that the people (who knew all the story) were looking on, she would speak to him. She walked by his side, and said: "George, I have put the locket in the arbour, with a letter for you. If you will not speak to me, read the letter, and throw the locket in the brook."

More she could not say, for he walked as fast as he could, and soon left her behind.

He would not go near the orchard all day, but at last in the evening, something prompted him to go. He went and looked, but the locket and the letter were not there.

Either she had not left them as she had said, or else some one had taken them. No one could enter the orchard without a key, unless they went to the trouble of bringing a ladder from the rick-yard, and as it was spring, there were no apples

to tempt them to do that. He thought, perhaps, his mother might have taken his key and gone to the arbour, and there was a terrible scene and bitter words between them—the first time he had ever replied to her. The consequence was that she packed a chest that very day, took a bag of money, which in old-fashioned style she kept under her bed, and left her home for ever; but not before she had been to the cottage, and reviled the girl with her duplicity and her falseness, declaring that if she had not got the locket, she had not put it in the orchard, but had sold it, like the hussy she was! Fortunately, however, she added, George could now see through her.

The farmer himself, much agitated at his mother's departure, made another search for the locket, and mowed the grass in the orchard himself, thinking that perhaps the lady had dropped it, or that it had caught in her dress and dragged along, and he also took the rake, and turned over every heap of dead leaves which the wind had blown into the corners. But there was no locket and no letter. At last he thought that perhaps the magpie, Kapchack—as magpies were always famous for their fondness for

glittering things, such as silver spoons—might have picked up the locket, attracted by the gleaming diamonds. He got a ladder and searched the nest, even pulling part of it to pieces, despite Kapchack's angry remonstrances, but the locket was not there.

As he came down the ladder there was the young lady who had stolen into the orchard, and watched his operations. They stood and faced each other for a minute: at least, she looked at him, *his* sullen gaze was bent upon the ground. As for her, the colour came and went in her cheek, and her breast heaved so that, for a while, she could not speak. At last she said very low, "So you do not believe me, but some day you will know that you have judged me wrongly." Then she turned, and without another word went swiftly from the orchard.

He did not follow her, and he never saw her again. The same evening she left the village, she and the old woman, her aunt, quietly and without any stir, and where they went (beyond the market town) no one knew, or even heard. And the very same evening, too, the rich gentleman who had given her the locket, and who had made an unwonted stay in his country home because of her, also left the

place, and went, as was said, to London. Of course people easily put two and two together, and said no doubt the girl had arranged to meet her wealthy admirer, but no one ever saw them together. Not even the coachman, when the gentleman once more returned home years afterwards, though the great authority in those days, could say what had become of her; if she had met his master it was indeed in some secret and mysterious manner. But the folk, when he had done speaking, and had denied these things, after he had quaffed his ale and departed, nudged each other, and said that no doubt his master, foreseeing the inquiries that would be made, had bribed him with a pocketful of guineas to hold his tongue.

So the farmer, in one day, found himself alone; his dear lady, his mother, and his rival were gone. He alone remained, and alone he remained for the rest of his days. His rival, indeed, came back once now and then for short periods to his mansion; but his mother never returned, and died in a few years' time. Then indeed deserted, the farmer had nothing left but to cultivate, and dwell on the memory of the past. He neglected his business, and his farm; he left his

house to take care of itself; the cows wandered away, the horses leaped the hedges, other people's cattle entered his corn, trampled his wheat, and fattened on his clover. He did nothing. The hand of man was removed, and the fields, and the house, and the owner himself, fell to decay.

Years past, and still it was the same, and thus it was, that when Bevis and his papa drove up, Bevis was so interested and so inquisitive about the knocker, which had fallen from the front door. One thing, and one place only, received the owner's care, and that was the orchard, the arbour, the magpie's nest, and the footpath that led to the orchard gate. Everything else fell to ruin, but these were very nearly in the same state as when the young lady used to come to the orchard daily. For the old gentleman, as he grew old, and continued to dwell yet more and more upon the happy days so long gone by, could not believe that she could be dead, though he himself had outlived the usual span of life.

He was quite certain that she would some day come back, for she had said so herself; she had said that some day he would know that he had judged

her wrongly, and unless she came back it was not possible for him to understand. He was, therefore, positively certain that some day she would come along the old footpath to the gate in the orchard wall, open it with her duplicate key, walk to the arbour and sit down, and smile at the magpie's ways. The woodwork of the arbour had of course decayed long since, but it had been carefully replaced, so that it appeared exactly the same as when she last sat within it. The coping fell from the orchard wall, but it was put back; the gate came to pieces, but a new one was hung in its place.

Kapchack, thus protected, still came to his palace, which had reached an enormous size from successive additions and annual repairs. As the time went on people began to talk about Kapchack, and the extraordinary age to which he had now attained, till, by-and-by, he became the wonder of the place, and in order to see how long he would live, the gentlemen who had gamekeepers in the neighbourhood, instructed them to be careful not to shoot him. His reputation extended with his years, and those curious in such things came to see him from a distance, but could never obtain entrance to the

orchard, nor approach near his tree, for neither money nor persuasion could induce the owner to admit them.

In and about the village itself Kapchack was viewed by the superstitious with something like awe. His great age, his singular fortune, his peculiar appearance—having but one eye—gave him a wonderful prestige, and his chattering was firmly believed to portend a change of the weather or the wind, or even the dissolution of village personages. The knowledge that he was looked upon in this light rendered the other birds and animals still more obedient than they would have been. Kapchack was a marvel, and it gradually became a belief with them that he would never die.

Outside the orchard-gate, the footpath which crossed the lane, and along which the lady used to come, was also carefully kept in its former condition. By degrees the nut-tree faggots rotted away—they were supplanted by others; in the process of time the flints sunk into the earth, and then another waggon load was sent for. But the waggons had all dropped to pieces except one which chanced to have been under cover; this, too, was much decayed, still it

held together enough for the purpose. It was while this very waggon was jolting down from the hills with a load of flints to fill this hollow that the one particular flint, out of five thousand, worked its way through a hole in the bottom and fell on the road. And the rich old gentleman, whose horse stepped on it the same evening, who was thrown from the dog-cart, and whose discharged groom shot him in his house in London, was the very same man, who, years and years before had given the diamond locket to the young lady.

In the orchard the old farmer pottered about every day, now picking up the dead wood which fell from the trees, now raking up the leaves, and gathering the fruit (except that on Kapchack's tree) now mowing the grass, according to the season, now weeding the long gravel path at the side under the sheltering wall, up and down which the happy pair had walked in the winters so long ago. The butterflies flew over, the swallows alighted on the topmost twigs of the tall pear and twittered sweetly, the spiders spun their webs, or came floating down on gossamer year after year, but he did not notice that they were not the same butterflies or the same swallows which had

been there in his youth. Everything was the same to him within the orchard, however much the world might change without its walls.

Why the very houses in the village close by had many of them fallen and been rebuilt; there was scarcely a resident left who dwelt there then; even the ancient and unchangeable church was not the same—it had been renovated; why even the everlasting hills were different, for the slopes were now in many places ploughed, and grew oats where nothing but sheep had fed. But all within the orchard was the same; his lady, too, was the same without doubt, and her light step would sooner or later come down the footpath to her lover. This was the story Bevis's papa told him afterwards.

They had some difficulty in fastening up the horse, until they pulled some hay from a hayrick, and spread it before him, for like Bevis he had to be bribed with cake, as it were, before he would be good. They then knocked at the front door, which was propped up with a beam of timber, but no one answered, nor did even a dog bark at the noise; indeed, the dog's kennel had entirely disappeared, and only a piece of the staple to which his

chain had been fastened remained, a mere rusty stump in the wall. It was not possible to look into this room, because the broken windows were blocked with old sacks to keep out the draught and rain; but the window of the parlour was open, the panes all broken, and the casement loose, so that it must have swung and banged with the wind.

Within, the ceiling had fallen upon the table, and the chairs had mouldered away; the looking-glass on the mantelpiece was hidden with cobwebs, the cobwebs themselves disused; for as they collected the dust, the spiders at last left them to spin new ones elsewhere. The carpet, if it remained, was concealed by the dead leaves which had been carried in by the gales. On these lay one or two picture frames, the back part upwards, the cords had rotted from the nails, and as they dropped so they stayed. In a punch bowl of ancient ware, which stood upon the old piano untouched all these years, a robin had had his nest. After Bevis had been lifted up to the window ledge to look in at this desolation, they went on down towards the orchard, as if the old gentleman was not within he was certain to be there.

They found the gate of the orchard open—rather

an unusual thing, as he generally kept it locked, even when at work inside—and as they stepped in, they saw a modern double-barrel gun leant against a tree. A little farther, and Bevis caught sight of Kapchack's nest, like a wooden castle in the boughs, and clapped his hands with delight. But there was a ladder against Kapchack's tree, a thing which had not been seen there these years and years, and underneath the tree was the old farmer himself, pale as his own white beard, and only kept from falling to the ground by the strong arms of a young gentleman who upheld him. They immediately ran forward to see what was the matter.

Now it had happened in this way. It will be recollected that when the keeper fell from the dead oak-tree, he not only disabled himself, but his gun going off shot the dogs. Thus when the heir to the estate came down the same evening, he found that there was neither dog nor keeper to go round with him the next day. But when the morning came, not to be deprived of his sport, he took his gun and went forth alone into the fields. He did not find much game, but he shot two or three partridges and a rabbit, and he was so tempted by

the crowds of wood-pigeons that were about (parties from Choo Hoo's army out foraging), that he fired away the remaining cartridges in his pocket at them.

So he found himself early in the day without a cartridge, and was just thinking of walking back to the house for some more, when the shadow of the eclipse came over. He stayed leaning against a gate to watch the sun, and presently as he was looking up at it a hare ran between his legs—so near, that had he seen her coming he could have caught her with his hands.

She only went a short way down the hedge, and he ran there, when she jumped out of the ditch, slipped by him, and went out fifty or sixty yards into the field, and sat up. How he now wished that he had not shot away all his ammunition at the wood-pigeons! While he looked at the hare she went on, crossed the field, and entered the hedge on the other side; he marked the spot, and hastened to get over the gate, with the intention of running home for cartridges. Hardly had he got over, than the hare came back again on that side of the hedge, passed close to him, and again leaped into

the ditch. He turned to go after her, when out she came again, and crouched in a furrow only some twenty yards distant.

Puzzled at this singular behaviour (for he had never seen a hare act like it before), he ran after her; and the curious part of it was, that although she did indeed run away, she did not go far—she kept only a few yards in front, just evading him. If she went into a hedge for shelter, she quickly came out again, and thus this singular chase continued for some time. He got quite hot running, for though he had not much hope of catching the creature, still he wanted to understand the cause of this conduct.

By-and-by the zig-zag and uncertain line they took led them close to the wall of the old gentleman's orchard, when suddenly a fox started out from the hedge, and rushed after the hare. The hare, alarmed to the last degree, darted into a large drain which went under the orchard, and the fox went in after her. The young gentleman ran to the spot, but could not of course see far up the drain. Much excited, he ran round the orchard wall till he came to the gate, which chanced to

be open, because the farmer that day, having discovered that the great bough of Kapchack's tree had been almost torn from the trunk by the gale, had just carried a fresh piece of timber in for a new prop, and having his hands full, what with the prop and the ladder to fix it, he could not shut the gate behind him. So the sportsman entered the orchard, left his gun leaning against a tree, and running down to see if he could find which way the drain went, came upon the old gentleman, and caught sight of the extraordinary nest of old king Kapchack.

Now the reason Ulu (for it was the very hare Bevis was so fond of) played these fantastic freaks, and ran almost into the very hands of the sportsman, was because the cunning Fox had driven her to do so for his own purposes.

After he learnt the mysterious underground saying from the toad imprisoned in the elm, he kept on thinking, and thinking, what it could mean; but he could not make it out. He was the only fox who had a grandfather living, and he applied to his grandfather, who after pondering on the matter all day, advised him to keep his eyes open. The

Fox turned up his nostrils at this advice, which seemed to him quite superfluous. However, next day instead of going to sleep as usual he did keep his eyes open, and by-and-by saw a notch on the edge of the sun, which notch grew bigger, until the shadow of the eclipse came over the ground.

At this he leaped up, recognising in a moment the dead day of the underground saying. He knew where Bevis' hare had her form, and immediately he raced across to her, though not clearly knowing what he was going to do; but as he crossed the fields he saw the sportsman without any dogs, and an empty gun leaning over the gate and gazing at the eclipse. With a snarl the Fox drove Ulu from her form, and so worried her that she was obliged to run (to escape his teeth) right under the sportman's legs, and thus to fulfil the saying, "The hare hunted the hunter."

Even yet the Fox did not know what was going to happen, or why he was doing this, for such is commonly the case during the progress of great events. The actors do not recognise the importance of the part they are playing. The age does not know what it is doing; posterity alone can appreciate it. But

after a while, as the Fox drove the Hare out of the hedges, and met and faced her, and bewildered the poor creature, he observed that her ziz-zag course, entirely unpremeditated, was leading them closer and closer to the orchard where Kapchack (whom he wished to overthrow) had his palace.

Then beginning to see whither fate was carrying them, suddenly he darted out and drove the Hare into the drain, and for safety followed her himself. He knew the drain very well, and that there was an outlet on the other side, having frequently visited the spot in secret in order to listen to what Kapchack was talking about. Ulu, quite beside herself with terror, rushed through the drain, leaving pieces of her fur against the projections of the stones, and escaped into the lane on the other side, and so into the fields there. The Fox remained in the drain to hear what would happen.

The sportsman ran round, entered the gate, and saw the old farmer trimming the prop, the ladder just placed against the tree, and caught sight of the palace of king Kapchack. As he approached a missel-thrush flew off—it was Eric; the farmer looked up at this, and saw the stranger, and was

at first inclined to be very angry, for he had never been intruded upon before, but as the young gentleman at once began to apologise for the liberty, he overlooked it, and listened with interest to the story the sportsman told him of the vagaries of the Hare. While they were talking the sportsman looked up several times at the nest above him, and felt an increasing curiosity to examine it. At last he expressed his wish; the farmer demurred, but the young gentleman pressed him so hard, and promised so faithfully not to touch anything, that at last the farmer let him go up the ladder, which he had only just put there, and which he had not himself as yet ascended.

The young gentleman accordingly went up the ladder, being the first who had been in that tree for years, and having examined and admired the nest, he was just going to descend, when he stayed a moment to look at the fractured bough. The great bough had not broken right off, but as the prop gave way beneath it had split at the part where it joined the trunk, leaving an open space, and revealing a hollow in the tree. In this hollow something caught his eye; he put in his hand and

drew forth a locket, to which an old and faded letter was attached by a mouldy ribbon twisted round it. He cast this down to the aged farmer, who caught it in his hand, and instantly knew the locket which had disappeared so long ago.

The gold was tarnished, but the diamonds were as bright as ever, and glittered in the light as the sun just then began to emerge from the eclipse. He opened the letter, scarce knowing what he did; the ink was faded and pale, but perfectly legible, for it had been in a dry place. The letter said that having tried in vain to get speech with him, and having faced all the vile slander and bitter remarks of the village for his sake, she had at last resolved to write and tell him that she was really and truly his own. In a moment of folly she had, indeed, accepted the locket, but that was all, and since the discovery she had twice sent it back, and it had twice been put on her dressing-table, so that she found it there in the morning (doubtless by the old woman, her aunt, bribed for the purpose).

Then she thought that perhaps it would be better to give it to him (the farmer), else he might doubt that she had returned it; so she said, as he

would not speak to her, she should leave it in the arbour, twisting the ribbon round her letter, and she begged him to throw the locket in the brook, and to believe her once again, or she should be miserable for life. But if after this he still refused to speak to her, she would still stay a while and endeavour to obtain access to him; and if even then he remained so cruel, there was nothing left for her but to quit the village, and go to some distant relations in France. She would wait, she added, till the new moon shone in the sky, and then she must go, for she could no longer endure the insinuations which were circulated about her. Lest there should be any mistake she enclosed a copy of a note she had sent to the other gentleman, telling him that she should never speak to him again. Finally, she put the address of the village in France to which she was going, and begged and prayed him to write to her.

When the poor old man had read these words, and saw that after all the playful magpie must have taken the glittering locket and placed it, not in his nest, but a chink of the tree; when he learned that all these years and years the girl he had so dearly

loved must have been waiting with aching heart for a letter of forgiveness from him, the orchard swam round, as it were, before his eyes, he heard a rushing sound like a waterfall in his ears, the returning light of the sun went out again, and he fainted. Had it not been for the young gentleman, who caught him, he would have fallen to the ground, and it was just at this moment that Bevis and his papa arrived at the spot.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREAT BATTLE.

Early the same morning when Kapchack awoke, he was so much refreshed by the sound slumber he had enjoyed, that much of his depression—the sharp edge of his pain as it were—had passed away. The natural vivacity of his disposition asserted itself, and seemed to respond to the glory of the sunshine. Hungry from his long fast, away he flew to well-known places reserved for his own especial feeding-ground, and having satisfied his appetite went up into a hawthorn, trimmed his feathers, and began to think things over.

He at once decided that something of an exceptional character must be attempted in order to regain his authority. Half measures, delays, and intrigues were now in vain; some grand blow must be struck, such as would fill all hearts with admiration or dismay. Another treaty with Choo Hoo was out of

the question, for the over-bearing rebel would throw in his face the assassination of the envoy, and even could it be thought of, who could he entrust with the mission? His throne was completely surrounded with traitors. He ground his beak as he thought of them, and resolved that terrible indeed should be the vengeance he would take if once he got them again into his power. The hope of revenge was the keenest spur of all to him to adventure something bold and unexpected; the hope of revenge, and the determination that the house of Kapchack should not fall without an effort worthy of a monarch.

He resolved to at once attack the mighty horde Choo Hoo commanded with the only troops he could get quickly together in this emergency. These were the rooks, the prætorian guard of his state, the faithful, courageous, and warlike tenth legion of his empire. No sooner did he thus finally resolve than his whole appearance seemed to change. His outward form in some degree reflected the spirit within. His feathers ruffled up, and their black and white shone with new colour. The glossy green of his tail gleamed in the sunshine. One eye indeed was gone, but the other sparkled with the fire of war; he

scented the battle, and sharpened his bill against the bough.

He only regretted that he had not taken this course before, instead of idling in the palace, and leaving his kingdom to the wiles of traitorous courtiers and delegates. If he had only bestirred himself like the ancient Kapchack of former days this extremity would not have arisen. Even yet it was not too late; war was a desperate and uncertain game, and it was not always the greatest army, in point of numbers, that rejoiced in the victory. He would trust in his fortune, and swoop down upon the enemy. Calling to his body guard, he flew at once straight towards the plain, where, at that time in the morning, he knew the main body of the rooks would be foraging. Full of these resolutions he did not observe the maimed beetle lying helpless in the grass, but looking neither to the right nor the left, taking counsel of no one—for to whom could he apply for honest advice?—he winged his way swiftly onward.

In about half-an-hour he reached the plain, and saw the rooks scattered over the ground; he rested here upon the lower branch of an elm, and sent

forward a messenger, one of the eight magpies who attended him, to tell the commander-in-chief to wait upon him. Upon receiving the message, the general, hoping that at last the king had decided upon action, since so abrupt a summons to his side was somewhat unusual, flew hastily to the elm and saluted the monarch. Kapchack, without any preamble, announced his intention of forming the rooks into column, and falling at once upon the horde of barbarians. In the rooks, he said, and their loyal commander, lay the last hope of the state—he placed himself in their midst and relied upon them solely and alone.

Ah Kurroo Khan, the commander-in-chief, could scarcely refrain from shouting with delight. He was not only wild with the joy of coming combat, but this straightforward speech and conduct went to his heart, and never in all his long, long reign, had Kapchack so complete and autocratic an empire as at that moment over the rooks.

Ah Kurroo, when he had in some degree expressed his pleasure at these commands, and the readiness with which he placed himself and his army at Kapchack's orders, proceeded first to pass the

word to the legions to fall into their ranks, and next to inform the monarch of the position held by the enemy.

They were, he said, dispersed in all directions foraging, and discipline was much relaxed, insomuch that several bands of them had even fallen to blows amongst themselves. To attack these scattered positions, which could individually be easily overwhelmed, would be a mistake, for these reasons. The advantage of destroying one or two such bands of marauders would be practically nothing, and while it was being accomplished the rest would carry the information to Choo Hoo, and he would assemble his enormous horde. Thus the chance of surprising and annihilating his army would be lost.

But it appeared that Choo Hoo's son, Tu Kiu, who was also the second in command of the barbarians, finding that already the country was becoming denuded of supplies close to the camp, had during the previous day, at his father's orders, marched a large division—in itself an immense army—into a plain at a few miles distance, which was surrounded with the hills, and out of sight from the camp. The best strategy therefore open to

Kapchack, was either to assail Choo Hoo's camp, or else to fall upon the divisions of Tu Kiu.

The difficulty in the case of the camp was that amidst the trees the assailants would suffer as much loss from crushing and confusion as would be inflicted upon the enemy. It was impossible, when once involved in a forest conflict, to know which way the issue was tending. The battle became split up into a thousand individual combats, discipline was of no avail, no officer could survey the scene or direct the movements, and a panic at any moment was only too probable. On the other hand, the division of Tu Kiu offered itself for annihilation. It was not only several miles distant from the main body, but a range of hills between prevented all view, and obstructed communication. There was a route by which the plain could be approached, through a narrow valley well sheltered with woods, which would screen the advancing troops from sight, and enable them to debouch at once into the midst of the invaders. Without doubt, thus suddenly attacked, Tu Kiu must give way; should victory declare for them decisively, it was easy to foretell what would happen. Tu Kiu falling back in dis-

order would confuse the regiments of Choo Hoo coming to his assistance, a panic would arise, and the incredible host of the barbarians would encumber each other's flight.

Kapchack listened to the Khan with the deepest attention, approved of all he had put forward, and gave the order to attack Tu Kiu.

Without a sound—for Ah Kurroo had strictly enjoined silence, lest the unusual noise should betray that something was intended—the legions fell into rank, and at the word of command, suppressing even the shout of joy which they wished so much to utter, moved in a dense column to the southwards. Kapchack, with his guards behind him, and Ah Kurroo Khan at his side led the van.

The Khan secretly congratulated himself as he flew upon his extraordinary good fortune, that he should thus enter the field of battle unhampered with any restrictions, and without the useless and unpleasant companionship of a political officer, appointed by the council of his nation. Well he knew that had Kapchack given the least notice of his intention, the rook council would have assembled and held interminable discussions upon the best method of

carrying out the proposed object, ending, as usual, with a vote in which mere numbers prevailed, without any reference to reason or experience, and with the appointment of a state official to overlook the conduct of the general, and to see that he did not arrogate too much to himself.

Thus in fact the rooks were accustomed to act, lest a commander should become too victorious. They liked indeed to win, and to destroy the enemy, and to occupy his territory, but they did not like all this to be accomplished by one man, but the rather, at the very zenith of his fame, provided him with an opportunity for disgracing himself, so that another might take his place and divide the glory. Ah Kurroo knew all this; imagine, then, his joy that Kapchack without calling parliament together had come direct to the camp, and ordered an immediate advance. Himself choosing the route, trusting to no guides, not even to his own intelligence department, Ah Kurroo pointed the way, and the legions with steady and unvarying flight followed their renowned commander.

The noise of their wings resounded, the air was oppressed with their weight and the mighty mass in

motion. Then did Kapchack indeed feel himself every feather a king. He glanced back—he could not see the rear-guard, so far did the host extend. His heart swelled with pride and eagerness for the fight. Now quitting the plain, they wound by a devious route through the hills—the general's object being to so manage the march that none of them should appear above the ridges. The woods upon the slopes concealed their motions, and the advance was executed without the least delay, though so great was their length in this extended order that when the head of the column entered the plain beyond, the rear-guard had not reached the hills behind. This rendered their front extremely narrow, but Ah Kurroo, pausing when he had gone half-a-mile into the plain, and when the enemy were already in sight, and actually beneath them, ordered the leading ranks to beat time with their wings, while their comrades came up.

Thus, in a few minutes, the place where the narrow valley debouched into the hill-surrounded plain, was darkened with the deploying rooks. Kapchack, while waiting, saw beneath him the hurrying squadrons of Tu Kiu. From the cut corn, from the stubble, from the furrows (where already the plough had begun

its work), from the green roots and second crops of clover, from the slopes of the hills around, and the distant ridges, the alarmed warriors were crowding to their standards.

While peacefully foraging happy in the sunshine and the abundance of food, without a thought of war and war's hazards, they suddenly found themselves exposed, all unprepared to the fell assault of their black and mortal enemies. The sky above them seemed darkened with the legions, the hoarse shouts of command as the officers deployed their ranks, the beating of the air, struck them with terror. Some, indeed, overwhelmed with affright, cowered on the earth; a few of the outlying bands, who had wandered farthest turned tail and fled over the ridges. But the majority, veterans in fight, though taken aback, and fully recognising the desperate circumstances under which they found themselves, hastened with all speed towards Tu Kiu, whose post was in a hedge, in which stood three low ash trees by a barn. This was about the centre of the plain, and thither the squadrons and companies hurried, hoarsely shouting for their general.

Tu Kiu, undismayed, and brave as became the son

and heir of the mighty emperor Choo Hoo, made the greatest efforts to get them into some kind of array and order. Most fell into rank of their own accord from long use and habit, but the misfortune was that no sooner had one regiment formed than fresh arrivals coming up threw all into disorder again. The crowd, the countless multitude overwhelmed itself; the air was filled, the earth covered, they struck against each other, and Tu Kiu, hoarse with shouting, was borne down, and the branch of ash upon which he stood broken with the weight of his own men. He struggled, he called, he cried; his voice was lost in the din and clangour.

Ah Kurroo Khan, soaring with Kapchack, while the legions deployed, marked the immense confusion of the enemy's centre. He seized the moment, gave the command, and in one grand charge the whole army bore swiftly down upon Tu Kiu. Kapchack himself could scarce keep pace with the increasing velocity of the charge; he was wrapped, as it were, around with the dense and serried ranks, and found himself hurled in a moment into the heart of the fight. Fight, indeed it could not be called.

The solid phalanx of the rooks swept through the

confused multitude before them, by their mere momentum cutting it completely in two, and crushing innumerable combatants underneath. In a minute, in less than a minute, the mighty host of Tu Kiu, the flower of Choo Hoo's army, was swept from the earth. He himself wounded, and half-stunned by the shock, was assisted from the scene by the unwearied efforts of his personal attendants.

Each tried to save himself regardless of the rest; the oldest veteran, appalled by such utter defeat, could not force himself to turn again and gather about the leaders. One mass of fugitives filled the air; the slopes of the hills were covered with them. Still the solid phalanx of Kapchack pressed their rear, pushing them before it.

Tu Kiu, who weary and faint, had alighted for a moment upon an ancient grass-grown earthwork—a memorial of former wars—which crowned a hill, found it necessary to again flee with his utmost speed, lest he should be taken captive.

It was now that the genius of Ah Kurroo Khan showed itself in its most brilliant aspect. Kapchack, intoxicated with battle, hurried the legions on to the slaughter—it was only by personal interference

that the Khan could restrain the excited king. Ah Kurroo, calm and far-seeing in the very moment of victory, restrained the legions, held them in, and not without immense exertion succeeded in checking the pursuit, and retaining the phalanx in good order. To follow a host so completely routed was merely to slay the slain, and to waste the strength that might profitably be employed elsewhere. He conjectured that so soon as ever the news reached Choo Hoo, the emperor, burning with indignation, would arouse his camp, call his army together, and without waiting to rally Tu Kiu's division, fly immediately to retrieve this unexpected disaster. Thus, the victors must yet face a second enemy, far more numerous than the first, under better generalship, and prepared for the conflict.

Ah Kurroo was, even now, by no means certain of the ultimate result. The rooks, indeed, were flushed with success, and impelled with all the vigour of victory; their opponents, however brave, must in some degree feel the depression attendant upon serious loss. But the veterans with Choo Hoo not only outnumbered them, and could easily outflank or entirely surround, but would also be under the influence of his personal

leadership. They looked upon Choo Hoo, not as their king, or their general only, but as their prophet, and thus the desperate valour of fanaticism must be reckoned in addition to their natural courage. Instead, therefore, of relying simply upon force, Ah Kurroo, even in the excitement of the battle, formed new schemes, and aimed to out-general the emperor.

He foresaw that Choo Hoo would at once march to the attack, and would come straight as a line to the battle-field. His plan was to wheel round, and, making a detour, escape the shock of Choo Hoo's army for the moment, and while Choo Hoo was looking for the legions that had overthrown his son, to fall upon and occupy his undefended camp. He was in hopes that when the barbarians found their rear threatened, and their camp in possession of the enemy, a panic would seize upon them.

Kapchack, when he had a little recovered from the frenzy of the fray, fully concurred, and without a minute's delay, Ah Kurroo proceeded to carry out this strategical operation. He drew off the legions for some distance by the same route they had come, and then, considering that he had gone far enough to avoid Choo Hoo, turned sharp to the left, and

flew straight for the emperor's camp, sheltered from view on the side towards it by a wood, and in front by an isolated hill, also crowned with trees. Once over that hill, and Choo Hoo's camp must inevitably fall into their hands. With swift, steady flight, the dark legions approached the hill, and were now within half a mile of it, when to Ah Kurroo's surprise and mortification the van-guard of Choo Hoo appeared above it, advancing directly upon them.

When the fugitives from the field of battle reached Choo Hoo, he could at first scarce restrain his indignation, for he had deemed the treaty in full force; he exclaimed against the perfidy of a Power which called itself civilised and reproached his host as barbarians, yet thus violated its solemn compacts. But recognising the gravity of the situation, and that there was no time to waste in words, he gave orders for the immediate assembly of his army, and while the officers carried out his command flew to a lofty fir to consider a few moments alone upon the course he should take.

He quickly decided that to attempt to rally Tu Kiu's division would be in vain, he did not even care to protect its retreat, for as it had been taken

so unawares, it must suffer the penalty of indiscretion. To march straight to the field of battle, and to encounter a solid phalanx of the best troops in the world, elated with victory, and led by a general like Ah Kurroo, and inspired, too, by the presence of their king, while his own army was dispirited at this unwonted reverse, would be courting defeat. He resolved to march at once, but to make a wide detour, and so to fall upon the rooks in their rear while they were pursuing Tu Kiu. The signal was given, and the vast host set out.

Thus the two generals, striving to out-wit each other, suddenly found themselves coming into direct collision. While fancying that they had arranged to avoid each other, they came, as it were, face to face, and so near, that Choo Hoo, flying at the head of his army, easily distinguished king Kapchack and the Khan. It seemed now inevitable that sheer force must decide between them.

But Choo Hoo, the born soldier, no sooner cast his keen glance over the fields which still intervened, than he detected a fatal defect in Kapchack's position. The rooks, not expecting attack, were advancing in a long dense column, parallel

with, and close to, a rising ground, all along the summit of which stood a row of fine beech-trees. Quick as thought, Choo Hoo commanded his centre to slacken their speed while facing across the line the rooks were pursuing. At the same time he sent for his left to come up at the double in extended order, so as to outflank Ah Kurroo's column, and then to push it, before it could deploy, bodily, and by mere force of numbers, against the beeches, where their wings entangled and their ranks broken by the boughs they must become confused. Then his right coming up swiftly, would pass over, and sweep the Khan's disordered army before it.

This manœuvre, so well-conceived, was at once begun. The barbarian centre slackened over the hill, and their left rushing forward, enclosed Ah Kurroo's column, and already bore down towards it, while the noise of their right could be heard advancing towards the beeches above, and on the other side of which it would pass. Ah Kurroo saw his danger—he could discover no possible escape from the trap in which he was caught, except in the desperate valour of his warriors. He shouted to them to increase their speed, and slightly swerv-

ing to his right, directed his course straight towards Choo Hoo himself. Seeing his design—to bear down the rebel emperor, or destroy him before the battle could well begin—Kapchack shouted with joy, and hurried forward to be the first to assail his rival.

Already the advancing hosts seemed to feel the shock of the combat, when a shadow fell upon them, and they observed the eclipse of the sun. Till that moment, absorbed in the terrible work they were about, neither the rank and file, nor the leaders had noticed the gradual progress of the dark semi-circle over the sun's disk. The ominous shadow fell upon them still more awful from its suddenness. A great horror seized the serried hosts. The prodigy in the heavens struck the conscience of each individual; with one consent, they hesitated to engage in carnage with so terrible a sign above them.

In the silence of the pause they heard the pheasants crow, and the fowls fly up to roost, the lesser birds hastened to the thickets. A strange dulness stole over their senses, they drooped, as it were; the barbarians sank to the lower atmosphere; the rooks, likewise overcome with this mysterious

lassitude, ceased to keep their regular ranks, and some even settled on the beeches.

Choo Hoo himself struggled in vain against the omen; his mighty mind refused to succumb to an accident like this; but his host was not so bold of thought. With desperate efforts he managed indeed to shake off the physical torpor which endeavoured to master him; he shouted "Koostakke!" but for the first time there was no response. The barbarians, superstitious as they were ignorant, fell back, and lost that unity of purpose which is the soul of an army. The very superstition and fanaticism which had been his strength, was now Choo Hoo's weakness. His host visibly melted before his eyes; the vast mass dissolved; the ranks became mixed together, without order or cohesion. Rage overpowered him; he stormed; he raved till his voice from the strain became inaudible. The barbarians were cowed, and did not heed him.

The rooks, less superstitious, because more civilised, could not, nevertheless, view the appearance of the sun without dismay, but as their elders were accustomed to watch the sky, and to deduce from its aspect the proper time for nesting, they were

not so over-mastered with terror as the enemy; but they were equally subjected by the mysterious desire of rest which seized upon them. They could not advance; they could scarce float in the air; some, as already observed, sought the branches of the beeches. Ah Kurroo, however, bearing up as well as he could against this strange languor, flew to and fro along the disordered ranks, begging them to stand firm, and at least close up if they could not advance, assuring them that the shadow would shortly pass, and that if they could only retain their ranks victory was certain, for the barbarians were utterly demoralised.

The drowsy rooks mechanically obeyed his orders, they closed their ranks as well as they could; they even feebly cheered him. But more than this they could not do. Above them the sun was blotted out, all but a rim of effulgent light, from which shone forth terrible and threatening flames. Some whispered that they saw the stars. Suddenly while they gazed, oppressed with awe, the woods rang with a loud cry, uttered by Kapchack.

The king, excited beyond measure, easily withstood the slumberous heaviness which the rest could

scarce sustain. He watched the efforts of the Khan with increasing impatience and anger. Then seeing that although the army closed up it did not move, he lost all control of himself. He shouted his defiance of the rebels before him, and rushed alone—without one single attendant—across the field towards Choo Hoo. In amazement at his temerity, the rooks watched him as if paralysed for a moment. Choo Hoo himself could scarce face such supernatural courage; when suddenly the rooks, as if moved by one impulse, advanced. The clangour of their wings resounded, a hoarse shout arose from their throats, they strained every nerve to overtake and assist their king.

Kapchack, wild with desperate courage, was within twenty yards of Choo Hoo, when the dense column of his own army passed him and crushed into the demoralised multitude of the enemy, as a tree overthrown by the wind crushes the bushes beneath it. Kapchack himself whirled round and round, and borne he knew not whither, scarce recognised whom he struck, but wreaked his vengeance till his sinews failed him, and he was forced to hold from sheer weariness. It is not possible to

describe the scene that now took place. The whole plain, the woods, the fields, were hidden with the hurrying mass of the fugitives, above and mixed with whom the black and terrible legions dealt destruction.

Widening out as it fled, the host of Choo Hoo was soon scattered over miles of country. None stayed to aid another; none even asked the other the best route to a place of safety; all was haste and horror. The pursuit, indeed, only ended with evening; for seven long hours the victors sated their thirst for slaughter, and would hardly have stayed even then had not the disjointed and weary fragments of Choo Hoo's army found some refuge now in a forest.

Choo Hoo himself only escaped from the ruck by his extraordinary personal strength; once free from the confused mass, his speed, in which he surpassed all the barbarians, enabled him to easily avoid capture. But as he flew his heart was dead within him, for there was no hope of retrieving this overwhelming disaster.

Meantime king Kapchack, when compelled by sheer physical weariness to fall out from the pur-

suit, came down and rested upon an oak. While he sat there alone and felt his strength returning, the sun began to come forth again from the shadow, and to light up the land with renewed brilliance. His attendants, who had now discovered his whereabouts, crowding round him with their congratulations, seized upon this circumstance as a fortunate omen. The dark shadow they said was past; like the sun, Kapchack had emerged to shine brighter than before. For once, indeed, the voice of flattery could not over-estimate the magnitude of this glorious victory.

It utterly destroyed the invading host, which for years had worked its way slowly into the land. It destroyed the prestige of Choo Hoo; never again would his race regard him as their invincible chief. It raised the reputation of king Kapchack to the skies. It crushed all domestic treason with one blow. If Kapchack was king before, now he was absolutely autocratic.

Where now was Ki Ki, the vain-glorious hawk who had deemed that without his aid nothing could be accomplished? Where the villanous crow, the sombre and dark designing Kauc, whose mur-

derous poniard would be thrust into his own breast with envy? Where the cunning Weasel, whose intrigues were swept away like spiders' webs? Where were they all? They were utterly at Kapchack's mercy. Mercy indeed! at his *mercy*—their instant execution was already certain. His body-guard, crowding about him, already began the pæan.

He set out to return to his palace, flushed with a victory of which history furnishes no parallel. It would have been well if he had continued in this intention to at once return, summon his council, and proclaim the traitors. Had he gone direct thither he must have met Eric, the Missel-thrush, who alone was permitted to frequent the orchard. Eric, alarmed at seeing a stranger in the orchard, and at the unprecedented circumstance of his ascending the ladder into the apple-tree, had started away to find the king, and warn him that something unusual was happening, and not to return till the coast was clear. He had not yet heard of the battle, or rather double battle that morning, nor did he know which way Kapchack had gone, but he considered that most probably the Woodpecker could

tell him, and therefore flew direct towards the copse to inquire.

If Kapchack had continued his flight straight to his palace he would have passed over the copse, and the Missel-thrush would have seen him and delivered his message. But as he drew near home Kapchack saw the clump of trees which belonged to Ki Ki not far distant upon his right. The fell desire of vengeance seized upon him; he turned aside, intending to kill Ki Ki with his own beak, but upon approaching nearer he saw that the trees were vacant. Ki Ki, indeed, had had notice of the victory from his retainers soaring in the air, and guessing that the king's first step would be to destroy him, had instantly fled. Kapchack, seeing that the Hawk was not there, again pursued his return journey, but meantime the Missel-thrush had passed him.

The king was now within a few hundred yards of his fortress, the dome of his palace was already visible, and the voices of his attendants rose higher and higher in their strain of victory. The Missel-thrush had seen the Woodpecker, who informed him that Kapchack had just passed, and like the wind he rushed back to the orchard. But all the speed of

his wings was in vain, he could not quite overtake the monarch; he shouted, he shrieked, but the song of triumph drowned his cries. Kapchack was close to the wall of the orchard.

At the same time Bevis, not caring much about the locket or the letter, or the old gentleman (whose history he had not yet heard), while his papa spoke to, and aroused the old gentleman from his swoon, had slipped back towards the orchard gate where was an irresistible attraction. This was the sportsman's double-barrelled gun, leant there against a tree. He could scarce keep his hands off it; he walked round it; touched it; looked about to see if any one was watching, and was just on the point of taking hold of it, when the old gentleman rushed past, but seeing the gun, stopped and seized it. Finding, however, that it was not loaded, he threw it aside, and went on towards the house. In a minute he returned with the long single-barrelled gun, with which, so many years before, he had vowed to shoot his rival.

He had heard the Magpie returning, and mad with anger—since it was the Magpie's theft which had thus destroyed the happiness of his life, for

all might have been well had he had the letter—he hastened for his gun. As he came to the orchard gate, Kapchack, with his followers behind him, neared the wall. The avenger looked along his gun, pulled the trigger, and the report echoed from the empty, hollow house. His aim was uncertain in the agony of his mind, and even then Kapchack almost escaped, but one single pellet, glancing from the bough of an apple-tree, struck his head, and he fell with darkness in his eyes.

The old gentleman rushed to the spot, he beat the senseless body with the butt of his gun till the stock snapped; then he jumped on it, and stamped the dead bird into a shapeless remnant upon the ground. As this spectacle Bevis, who, although he was always talking of shooting and killing, could not bear to see anything really hurt, burst out into a passion of tears, lamenting the Magpie, and gathering up some of the feathers. Nor could they pacify him till they found him a ripe and golden King Pippin apple to eat.

CHAPTER VII.

PALACE SECRETS.

NEXT day Sir Bevis, so soon as ever he could get away after dinner, and without waiting for the noontide heat to diminish, set out in all haste for the copse, taking with him his cannon-stick. He was full of curiosity to know what would happen now that Kapchack was dead, who would now be king, and everything about it, all of which he knew he should learn from the Squirrel. He took his cannon-stick with him heavily loaded, and the charge rammed home well, meaning to shoot the Weasel; if the wretch would not come out when called upon to receive the due punishment of his crimes, he would bang it off into his hole in the tree, and, perhaps, some of the shot would reach the skulking vagabond.

He went up the field, reached the great oak tree, and crossed over to the corner of the wheat-field, but neither the Hare nor the dragon-fly were waiting about to conduct him, as was their duty.

He sat down on the grass to see if they would come to him, but although two dragon-flies passed over they did not stay to speak, but went on their journey. Neither of them was his guide, but they both went towards the copse. Immediately afterwards a humble-bee came along, droning and talking to himself as he flew. "Where is the Hare?" said Bevis; "and where is the dragon-fly?" "Buzz," said the humble-bee, "the usual course on occasions like the present—buzz—zz," the sound of his voice died away as he went past without replying. Three swallows swept by next at a great pace, chattering as they flew.

"Where's my dragon-fly?" said Bevis, but they were too busy to heed him. Presently a dove flew over too high to speak to, and then a missel-thrush, and soon afterwards ten rooks, after whom came a whole bevy of starlings, and behind these a train of finches. Next a thrush came along the low hedge, then two blackbirds, all so quick that Bevis could not make them understand him. A crow too appeared, but catching sight of Bevis's cannon-stick, he smelt the powder, wheeled round and went by far to the left-hand out of talking distance. Still more starlings

rushed overhead, and Bevis waved his hand to them, but it was no use. Just afterwards he saw a thrush coming, so he jumped up, pointed his cannon-stick, and said he would shoot if the thrush did not stop. Much frightened, the thrush immediately perched on the hedge, and begged Bevis not to kill him, for he remembered the fate of his relation who was shot with the same cannon.

"Tell me where the Hare is, and where is my dragon-fly," said Bevis; "and why are all the people hurrying away towards the copse, and why don't they stop and tell me, and what is all this about?"

"I do not know exactly where the Hare is," said the thrush, "but I suppose she is in the copse too, and I have no doubt at all the dragon-fly is there, and I am going myself so soon as you will let me."

"Why are you all going to the copse?" said Bevis. "Is it because Kapchack is dead?"

"Yes," said the thrush, "it is because the king is dead, and there is going to be an election, that is if there is time, or if it can be managed; for it is expected that Choo Hoo will return now Kapchack is overthrown."

"When did Choo Hoo go, then?" asked Bevis, —for he had not yet heard of the battle. So the thrush told him all about it, and how strange it was that king Kapchack in the hour of victory should be slain by the very man who for so many years had protected him. The thrush said that the news had no doubt reached Choo Hoo very soon afterwards, and everybody expected that the barbarians would gather together again, and come back to take vengeance, and so, as they now had no king or leader, they were all hastening to the copse to take sanctuary from Choo Hoo. The only doubt was whether the emperor would respect the enclosure hitherto regarded by all the civilised people as a place where they could meet without danger. The barbarians knew nothing of these tacit agreements, which make communication so easy and pleasant among educated people. Still there was nothing else they could do.

"And what is going on in the copse?" said Bevis, "and who is to be king?"

"I cannot tell you," said the thrush, "I was just going to see, and if possible to vote against Ki Ki, who treacherously slew my friend and relation the ambassador, whom the king sent to Choo Hoo."

"We will go together," said Bevis, "and you can tell me some more about it as we go along. One thing is quite certain, the Weasel will never be king."

"Before I go with you," said the thrush, "you must please leave off pointing that dreadful cannon-stick at me, else I shall not be able to converse freely."

So Bevis left off pointing it, and carried his gun over his shoulder, just as he had seen his papa carry his. The thrush flew slowly along beside him, but he could not quite manage to keep at exactly the same pace; his wings would carry him faster than Bevis walked, so he stopped on the ground every now and then for Bevis to come up.

"I am sure," he said, "I hope the Weasel will not be king, and there is a rumour going about that he is disabled by some accident he has met with. But I greatly fear myself that he will be, notwithstanding what you say, for he is so cunning, and has so terrible a reputation that no one can prevail against him."

"Pooh!" said Bevis, "don't tell me such stuff and rubbish; I say the Weasel shall not be king, for I am going to shoot him as dead as any

nail; after which Pan shall tear him into twenty pieces."

"But you tried to kill him once before, did you not?" said the thrush.

"You hold your tongue, this minute, you impudent thrush," said Bevis in a great rage; and he took his cannon-stick off his shoulder and looked so black that the thrush, alarmed for his safety, took advantage of a hedge being near, and slipped through it in a second.

"I'm very glad you're gone," said Bevis, calling after him, "but I'll shoot you next time I see you for leaving me without permission."

"And that will just serve him right," said a blackbird, as he hastened by, "for the thrush is the greediest bird in the world, and is always poaching about the places that belong to me."

Bevis was now very near the copse, and had not the least difficulty in finding the little bridge over the ditch, but he stopped before he crossed it, to listen to the noise there was inside among the trees. Whenever he had come before in the afternoon it was always so quiet, but now there was a perfect uproar of talking. Hundreds of starlings were chattering in the

fir-trees, and flying round the branches with incessant motion. In the thick hedge which enclosed it there were crowds of greenfinches, goldfinches, chaffinches, yellowhammers, and sparrows, who never ceased talking. Up in the elms there were a number of rooks, who were deliberating in a solemn manner; it was indeed the rook council who had met there to consider as the safest place, the very council that Ah Kurroo so much disliked. Two or three dozen wood-pigeons cowered on the lower branches of some ashes; they were the aliens who dwelt in Kapchack's kingdom. Rabbits were rushing about in all directions; dragon-flies darting up and down with messages; humble-bees droning at every corner; the Woodpecker yelled out his views in the midst of the wood; everything was in confusion.

As Bevis walked into the copse along the green track, with the tall thistles and the fern on each side of him, he caught little bits here and there of what they were saying; it was always the same, who was going to be king, and what would Choo Hoo do? How long would it be before the emperor's army could be got together again to come sweeping back and exact a dire vengeance for its defeat? Where was

the Weasel? What was the last atrocity Ki Ki had committed? Had anybody heard anything more of Kauc, the crow? Had Prince Tchack-tchack arrived? Had the rooks made up their mind?—and so on, till Bevis shook his head and held his hands to his ears, so tremendous was the din.

Just then he saw his own dragon-fly and beckoned to him; the dragon-fly came at once: "What is all this"—began Bevis.

"My dear, how are you?" interrupted the dragon-fly. "I am so busy," and off he went again.

"Well I never!" said Bevis, getting excited like the rest, when the Hare came across the path, and stopped to speak to him. "What is going on?" said Bevis.

"That is just what I want to know," said the Hare. "Everybody says that somebody is going to do something, but what it is they do not themselves know. There never was such a confusion, and for aught we know, Choo Hoo may be here any minute, and there's not a single regiment in position."

"Dear me!" said Bevis, "why ever don't they begin?"

"I cannot tell you," said the Hare. "I don't

think anybody knows how: and the fact is, they are all thinking about who shall be king, and intriguing for the sovereignty, when they should be thinking of their country, and providing for its defence."

"And who is to be king?" said Bevis. "The Weasel shall not, that is certain; for I am just this very minute going to shoot into his hole!"

"It is no use to do that," said the Hare; "though I am very glad to hear you say that he shall not be king. But it is no use shooting into his hole, for he is not there, nor anywhere in his old haunts, and we are all very suspicious as to what he is about. I think you had better come and see the Squirrel; he is in the raspberries, and the Jay is there too, and there is an immense deal of talking going on."

"So I will," said Bevis; and he followed the Hare to the raspberries (all the fruit was now gone), and found the Squirrel, who advanced to welcome him, and the Jay up in the oak. Being hot with walking in the sun, Bevis sat down on the moss at the foot of the oak, and leaned back against the tree whose beautiful boughs cast so pleasant a

shadow. The Hare came close to him on one side, and the Squirrel the other, and the Jay perched just overhead, and they all began to tell him the news at once. Not able to understand what they meant while they were all speaking together, Bevis held up his hands and begged them to stop a minute, and then asked the Squirrel to explain.

"So I will," said the Squirrel, "though I ought to be hiding my stores as fast as I can from the voracious host of barbarians, who will be here in a minute. But what am I to do? for I cannot get anybody to help me — everybody is thinking about himself."

"But the story—the story!" said Bevis; "tell me all about it."

"Well, since I can do nothing," said the Squirrel, "I suppose I must, though there is not a great deal to tell. You must know, then, that the news of Kapchack's death got here in half-a-minute, for the Missel-thrush came with it, and from here it was all over the country in less than an hour. Everybody knew it except Ah Kurroo Khan and the victorious legions, and Choo Hoo and the flying enemy. These were so busy, the one with slaughter,

and the other with trying to escape, that they could not listen to what the swifts at once flew to tell them, but continued to fight and fly away till the evening, when the fragments of Choo Hoo's army took refuge in the forest. Even then they would not believe so extraordinary a circumstance, but regarded the account that had reached them as one of the rumours which always fly about at such times. Choo Hoo continued to go from tree to tree deeper and deeper into the forest.

"Ah Kurroo Khan, calling off his legions, since nothing further could be done, drew his victorious army back to some isolated clumps and avenues, where they intended to make their camp for the night. But in the course of an hour the rumours increased so much, and so many messengers arrived with the same intelligence and additional particulars, that Ah Kurroo Khan, dreading lest it should be true, sent out a squadron to ascertain the facts.

"Long before it could return, an envoy arrived from the council of the rooks themselves, with an order to Ah Kurroo Khan to retire at once, notwithstanding the lateness of the evening, and that the sun was sinking.

"With much disappointment (for he had hoped to continue the pursuit, and entirely exterminate the barbarians on the morrow), and not without forebodings as to his own fate, Ah Kurroo reluctantly communicated the order to his troops. The wearied legions accordingly started on their homeward journey, slowly passing over the fields which had witnessed the conquest of the morning. The sun had already sunk when their van reached the rooks' city, and Ah Kurroo came to the front to deliver the report he had prepared upon his way. As he approached the trees where the council of the rooks was sitting, in dark and ominous silence, an official stopped him, and informed him that he had been dismissed from the command, degraded from the rank he held, and the title of Khan taken from him. He was to retire to a solitary tree at some distance, and consider himself under arrest.

"Thus they punished him for daring to move without their orders (even at the direct instance of the king), and thus was he rewarded for winning the greatest battle known to history. The legions were immediately disbanded, and each individual

ordered to his home. Meantime, the news had at last reached Choo Hoo, but neither he, nor the fugitive host, could believe it, till there arrived some of the aliens who had dwelt with us, and who assured the barbarians that it was correct. Directly afterwards, the intelligence was confirmed by the retreat of Ah Kurroo Khan.

"All that livelong night Choo Hoo, once more beginning to hope, flew to and fro from tree to tree, endeavouring to animate his host afresh with spirit for the fight; and as messengers continually came in with fresh particulars of the confusion in Kapchack's kingdom, he began to succeed. Early this morning, when the sun rose, the mystic syllables, 'Koos-takke,' resounded once more; the forest was alive, and echoed with the clattering of their wings, as the army drew together and re-formed its ranks. The barbarians, easily moved by omens, saw in the extraordinary death of Kapchack the very hand of fate. Once more they believed in their emperor; once more Choo Hoo advanced at their head.

"Not half-an-hour since a starling came in with the intelligence that Choo Hoo's advanced guard

had already reached his old camp. We suppose the barbarians will halt there a little while for refreshment, and then move down upon us in a mass. Would you believe it, instead of preparing for defence, the whole state is rent with faction and intrigue! Yonder the council of the rooks, wise as they are, are indeed deliberating, having retired here for greater safety lest their discussion should be suddenly interrupted by the enemy; but the subject of this discussion is not how to defend the country, but what punishment they shall inflict upon Ah Kurroo. There is a difference of opinion. Some hold that the established penalty for his offence is to break his wings and hurl him helpless from the top of the tallest elm. Some, more merciful, are for banishment, that he be outlawed, and compelled to build his nest and roost on an isolated tree, exposed to all the insults of the crows. The older members of the council, great sticklers for tradition, maintain that the ancient and only adequate punishment is the hanging up of the offender by one leg to a dead and projecting branch, there to dangle and die of starvation, a terror to all such evil-doers.

"While they thus talk of torture the enemy is in

sight, and their own army, it is more than whispered, is discontented and angry at the reception meted out to the victorious Khan. But this, alas! is not all.

"So soon as ever Ki Ki was certain that Kapchack was really dead, he returned, and he has gathered to himself a crew of the most terrible ruffians you ever beheld. He has got about him all the scum of the earth; all the blackguards, villains, vermin, cut-throat scoundrels have rallied to his standard; as the old proverb says, 'Birds of a feather flock together.' He has taken possession of the firs, yonder, on the slope (which are the property of my friend the Jay), and which command my copse. He has proclaimed himself king, and seeks to obtain confirmation of his title by terrorism. Already he has twice sent forth his murderous banditti, who, scouring the fields, have committed fearful havoc upon defenceless creatures. I am in dread every minute lest he should descend upon the copse itself, for he respects no law of earth or heaven.

"At the same time Kauc, the crow, has come forth in his true colours; he too has proclaimed himself king. He has taken his stand in the trees

by the Longpond—you came close by them just now —they are scarce a quarter of a mile hence. To our astonishment, he has got at least thrice as many retainers as he is entered to have in the roll which was read before Kapchack. He had reckoned, it seems, upon the assistance of Cloctaw, of St. Paul's, who has great influence among the jackdaws. Cloctaw, however, avoided him and came hither, and Kauc vows he will destroy him.

"I know not which is most formidable, the violent Ki Ki or the ruthless Kauc. The latter, I feel sure, is only waiting till he sees an opening to rush in and slaughter us. There is not a generous sentiment in his breast; he would not spare the fledgling in the nest. Between these two, one on either hand, we are indeed in a fearful predicament; Choo Hoo is to be preferred to them.

"Whether Raoul, the Rat, intends to strike a blow for the throne, I know not; he is here; he bears an evil character, but for myself I like him far better than Kauc or Ki Ki. The Fox is, of course, out of the question. But my great fear is the Weasel; should he obtain the throne which of us will be safe? By night as well as by day we

shall be decimated. His Machiavellian schemes, indeed, have thus far gone astray, and although he could arrange for everything, he could not foresee his own illness. Yet, though lying by now with a broken rib and other injuries, I have not the least doubt he is weaving new webs and preparing fresh deceptions. Thus, while the invader threatens us hourly, the kingdom of Kapchack is torn to pieces with the dissensions of those who should defend it."

"But why does not Prince Tchack-tchack take the throne and be king?" said Bevis. "He is the heir; he is Kapchack's son."

"So he ought," said the Squirrel; "but the truth is, people are weary of the rule of the magpies; nor is this young and flighty prince capable of taking up the reins of state. He is vain, and dissipated, and uncertain—no one can depend upon him. And besides, even if they could, have you not heard the extraordinary secret he has let out, like the great lout he is, and of which everybody is talking?"

"No," said Bevis; "I have heard nothing—how should I? I have only just got here. What is the secret? Tell me the secret this minute."

"To think," said the Jay, "that we should have been so long deceived. But I had my suspicions."

"I cannot say I suspected anything," said the Hare; "but I remember Kauc did make a very curious remark on one occasion; he was always looking askew into things and places that did not concern him, so that I did not much heed, especially as he had started slanders about me."

"Well," said the Jay, "the truth is, my wife—she is, you know, the most beautiful creature in the world, and quite turned the head of the late monarch—told me that she all along had her ideas; and Kapchack himself indeed told her in confidence that he was not so old as he looked, being jealous of the youth of Tchack-tchack, who objected to having his eye pecked out, and his feathers ruffled, as if he had any claims to be handsome;" and the Jay surveyed his own bright feathers with pride.

"You stupids!" said Bevis, "what is the use of talking in that way? I want to know the secret."

"There is no secret," said the Jay; "and I am not stupid. How can there be a secret, when everybody knows it?"

"Hush! hush!" said the Hare, trying to make peace; "do not let us quarrel, at all events, if all the rest do."

"No," said the Squirrel; "certainly not."

"Certainly not;" repeated the Jay.

"Well, what is it, then?" said Bevis, still frowning.

"The fact is," said the Squirrel, "Tchack-tchack has babbled out the great state secret. I myself knew a little of it previously, having overheard the Crow muttering to himself—as Ulu said, he peers into things that do not concern him. And, if you remember, Bevis, I was in a great fright one day when I nearly let it out myself. Now Prince Tchack-tchack, finding that he could not get the crown, has babbled everything in his rage, and the beautiful Jay has told us many things that prove it to be true. It now turns out that Kapchack was not Kapchack at all."

"Not Kapchack!" said Bevis. "How could Kapchack not be Kapchack, when he was Kapchack?"

"Kapchack could not be Kapchack," said the Squirrel, "because he never was Kapchack."

"Then who was Kapchack?" said Bevis, in amazement.

"Well, he was not who he was," said the Squirrel; "and I will tell you why it was that he was not, if you will listen, and not keep interrupting and asking questions. The Reed once told you how stupid it is to ask questions; you would understand everything very well, if you did not trouble to make inquiries. The king who is just dead, and who was called Kapchack, was not Kapchack, because the real old original Kapchack died forty years ago."

"What?" said Bevis.

"Extraordinary!" said the Jay.

"Extraordinary!" said the Hare.

"But true," said the Squirrel. "The real old original Kapchack, the cleverest, cunningest, most consummate schemer who ever lived, who built the palace in the orchard, and who played such fantastic freaks before the loving couple, who won their hearts, and stole their locket and separated them for ever (thinking that would serve his purpose best, since if they married they would forget him, and have other things to think about, while if they

were apart he should be regarded as a sacred souvenir), this marvellous genius, the founder of so illustrious a family, whose dominion stretched from here to the sea—I tell you that *this* Kapchack, the real old original one, died forty years ago.

"But before he died, being so extremely cunning, he made provision for the continuation of himself in this way. He reflected that he was very old, and that a good deal of the dignity he enjoyed was due to that fact. The owner of the orchard and warden of his fortress regarded him with so much affection, because in his youth he had capered before the young lady whom he loved. It was not possible for the old gentleman to transfer this affection to a young and giddy magpie, who had not seen any of these former things. Nor, looking outside the orchard wall, was it probable that the extensive kingdom he himself enjoyed would pass under the sway of a youthful prince in its entirety.

"Some of the nobles would be nearly certain to revolt: the empire he had formed with so much labour, ingenuity, and risk, would fall to pieces,

the life of one ruler not being sufficiently long to consolidate it. The old king, therefore, as he felt the years pressing heavy upon him, cast about in his mind for some means of securing his dynasty.

"After long cogitation one day he called to him his son and heir, a very handsome young fellow, much like the Tchack-tchack whom we know, and motioning him to come close, as if about to whisper in his ear, suddenly pecked out his left eye. The vain young prince suffered not only from the physical pain, but the intense mortification of knowing that his beauty was destroyed for ever. If he wanted even to look at himself in the pond, before he could see his own reflection, he had to turn his head upon one side. He bitterly upbraided his unnatural father for this cruel deed: the queen joined in the reproaches, and the palace resounded with rage and lamentation.

"Old king Kapchack the First bore all this disturbance with equanimity, sustained by the conviction that he had acted for the welfare of the royal house he had founded. After a time, when the young one-eyed prince ceased to complain, and was only sullen, he seized an opportunity when they were

alone in the apple-tree, and explained to him the reason why he had done it.

"'I,' said he, 'I have founded this house, and through me you are regarded everywhere as of royal dignity; but if I were gone, the wicked and traitorous world which surrounds the throne, would certainly begin to conspire against you on account of your youth; nor would the warden of this orchard take any interest or defend you, as you were not the witness of the caresses bestowed upon him by his young lady. If you look at me, you will see that a wound, received in the wars which I waged long since, extinguished my left eye. You will also see that my tail is not, to say the least, either so glossy or so ample as of yore, and my neck and temples are somewhat bare, partly because in those wars I received divers swashing blows upon my head, and partly because of my increasing age.'

"The prince looked at him, and remarked that he certainly was a draggled old scarecrow. Not the least annoyed by this unfilial expression, the old king proceeded to show his heir how, in order for him, first, to retain the kingdom, and secondly, to

keep the interest of the old gentleman owner of the orchard, it was necessary for him to present the same appearance as Kapchack himself did. 'In short,' said he, 'when I die you must be ready to take my place, and to look exactly like me.' The prince began to see the point, and even to admire the cunning of his father, but still he could not forgive the loss of his eye.

"'Ah!' said Kapchack I., 'you see I was obliged to take you upon the hop, otherwise it would never have been accomplished; no persuasion could have induced you to submit to such a deprivation, and, now I am about it, let me advise you, indeed, strictly enjoin upon you, when it becomes your turn, and you, too, are old and failing, to do the same as I did. Do not tell your son and heir what you are going to do, or depend upon it he will slip aside and avoid you; but do it first. And now, since you have already so far the same bleared aspect as myself, you will feel no difficulty in submitting to certain curtailments behind, and to the depilation of your head and neck.'

"Well, the result was, that the prince, full of ambition, and determined to rule at any price, in

the end submitted to these disfigurations; the only thing he groaned over was the fear that none of the young lady magpies would now have anything to say to him.

"'My dear and most dutiful son,' said the old king, greatly pleased at the changed attitude of his heir, 'I assure you that you will not experience any loss of attention upon that score. It is in early youth indeed a very prevalent mistake for gaudy young fellows (as you appeared the other day) to imagine that it is the gloss of their feathers, the brilliance of their eyes, and the carriage of their manly forms that obtains for them the smiles and favours of the fair. But, believe me, this gratifying idea is not founded in fact; it is not the glossy feather, or the manly form, my son, it is the wealth that you possess, and even more than that, the social dignity and rank, which is already yours, that has brought a circle of charming darlings around you.

"'It is certainly somewhat mortifying to feel that it is not ourselves they care for, but merely the gratification of their own vanity. Of course you must bury this profound secret in your own breast. But if you ponder over what I have said you will

soon see how you can use this knowledge to your own advantage. And it will at least save you from the folly of really falling in love, than which, my most dutiful son, there is no disease so terrible, and so lasting in its effects, as witness that drivelling fool who keeps this orchard for us, and surrounds our palace as with an impregnable fortification. Believe me, notwithstanding your now antique appearance—except at very close quarters, and without close examination (I don't think you have quite as many crow's-feet round your cyclopean eye as myself), it is not possible to distinguish you from me—believe me, in spite of this, the circle of charming darlings, reflecting that you are the heir to the greatest crown in the universe, will discover that you are even more attractive than before.'

"The prince in a day or two found that the old king was right, and recovered much of his former spirit. As for the old king, having provided for his dynasty, and feeling certain that his royal house would now endure, he feasted and laughed, and cracked the oddest jokes you ever heard. One afternoon, after spending the whole time in this way, he recollected that he had not yet informed his heir

of one important secret, namely, the entrance to his treasure house.

"This was a chink, covered over with an excrescence of the bark, in the aged apple-tree, at the juncture of a large bough (the very bough that was lately cracked by the hurricane), and it was here that he had accumulated the spoils of the many expeditions he had undertaken, the loot of provinces and the valuable property he had appropriated nearer home, including the diamond locket. So cunningly had he chosen his treasure vault that not one of all his courtiers, not even his queens, could ever discover it, though they were all filled with the most intense desire and burning cupidity. The monarch thoroughly enjoyed the jest, for all the time they were sitting right over it, and that was, no doubt, why they could not see it, being under their feet. Well, the old king recollected that afternoon, that he had not communicated the secret to his heir, and decided that the time had come when it was necessary to do so. He therefore gave out that he felt sleepy after so much feasting, and desired his friends to leave him alone for a while, all except the missel-thrush (not the present, of course, but his ancestor).

"Accordingly they all flew away to flirt in the copse, and so soon as the court was clear the king told the missel-thrush to go and send his son to him, as he had something of importance to communicate in private. The missel-thrush did as he was bid, and in about half-an-hour the young prince approached the palace. But when he came near he saw that the king, overcome perhaps by too much feasting, had dozed off into slumber. As it was a rule in the palace that the monarch must never be awakened, the prince perched silently close by.

"Now, while he was thus sitting waiting for the king to wake up, as he watched him it occurred to him that if any one came by—as the warden of the orchard—and saw the two magpies up in the tree, he would wonder which was which. Instead of one old Kapchack, lo! there would be two antique Kapchacks.

"Thought the prince, 'The king is very clever, exceedingly clever, but it seems to me that he has overreached himself. For certainly, if it is discovered that there are two old ones about, inquiries will be made, and a difficulty will arise, and it is not at

all unlikely that one of us will be shot. It seems to me that the old fellow has lived a little too long, and that his wits are departing (here he gave a quiet hop closer), and gone with his feathers, and it is about time I succeeded to the throne. (Another hop closer). In an empire like this, so recently founded, the sceptre must be held in vigorous claws, and upon the whole, as there is no one about'—— He gave a most tremendous peck upon the poor old king's head, and Kapchack fell to the ground, out of the tree, stone dead upon the grass.

"The prince turned his head upon one side, and looked down upon him; then he quietly hopped into his place, shut his eye, and dozed off to sleep. By-and-by the courtiers ventured back by twos and threes, and gathered on the tree, respectfully waiting till he should awake, and nodding, and winking, and whispering to each other about the body in the grass. Presently his royal highness woke up, yawned, complained that the gout grew worse as he got older, and asked for the prince, who had been sitting by him just now. Then looking round and seeing that all were a little constrained in their manner, he glanced in the same direction they did,

and exclaimed that there was his poor son and heir lying in the grass!

"With great lamentation he had the body laid out in state, and called in the court physicians to examine how the prince (for so he persisted in calling the dead monarch) came by his fate. Now, there was no disguising the fact that the deceased had been most foully murdered, for his skull was driven in by the force of the blow; but you see those were dangerous times, and with a despotic king eyeing them all the while, what could the physicians do? They discovered that there was a small projecting branch which had been broken off half-way down the tree and which had a sharp edge, or splinter, and that this splinter precisely fitted the wound in the head. Without doubt the prince had been seized with sudden illness, had fallen and struck his head against the splinter. It was ordered that this bough should be at once removed. Kapchack raised a great lamentation, as he had lost his son and heir, and in that character the dead monarch was ceremoniously interred in the royal vaults, which are in the drain the hunted hare took refuge in under the orchard.

"And so complete was the resemblance the prince bore to his dead parent, owing to the loss of his eye and the plucking of his feathers, that for the most part the courtiers actually believed that it really was the prince they had buried, and all the common people accepted it without doubt. One or two who hinted at a suspicion when they were alone with Kapchack the Second, received promises of vast rewards to hold their tongues; and no sooner had they left his presence than he had them assassinated. Thus the dynasty was firmly consolidated, just as the dead founder had desired, though in rather a different manner to what he expected.

"But the new (or as he appeared the old) king had not been many days on the throne when he remembered the immense treasure of which his parent had been possessed. Sending every one away on one pretext and another, he searched the palace from attic to basement, peeped into all the drawers his father had used, turned over every document, sounded every wall, bored holes in the wainscot, ripped up the bark, and covered himself with dust in his furious endeavours to find it. But though he did this twenty times, though he examined every

hollow tree within ten miles, and peered into everything, forcing even the Owl's ancestor to expose certain skeletons that were in his cupboard, yet could he never find it.

"And all the while the greatest difficulty he encountered was to hold his tongue; he did not dare let out that he was looking for the treasure, because, of course, everybody thought that he was Kapchack, the same who had put it away. He had to nip his tongue with his beak till it bled to compel himself by sheer pain to abstain from reviling his predecessor. But it was no good, the treasure could not be found. He gave out that all this searching was to discover an ancient deed or treaty by which he was entitled to a distant province. As the deed could not be found (having never existed), he marched his army and took the province by force. And, will you believe it, my friends, the fact is that from that time to this (till the hurricane broke the bough the other day) none of the king Kapchacks have had the least idea where their treasure was. They have lived upon credit.

"Everybody knew there was a treasure, and as time went on and new generations arose, it became

magnified as the tale was handed down, till only lately, as you know, the whole world considered that Kapchack possessed wealth the like of which had never been seen. Thus it happened that as each succeeding Kapchack got farther and farther away from the reality and lost all trace of the secret, the fame of these riches increased. But to return. In course of years this Kapchack also found himself growing old, and it became his turn to prepare a son and heir for the throne by pecking out his left eye, and denuding him of his tail feathers. I need not go into further details; suffice it to say the thing was managed, and although the old fellows well knew their danger and took all sorts of precautions, the princes thus mutilated always contrived to assassinate their parents, and thus that apple-tree has been the theatre of the most awful series of tragedies the earth has ever known.

"Down to the last king Kapchack, the thing was always managed successfully, and he was the sixth who had kept up the deception. But the number six seems in some way fatal to kings, the sixth always gets into trouble, and Kapchack VI., proved very unfortunate. For in his time, as you know, Choo Hoo

arose, the kingdom was invaded, and quite half of it taken from him. Whether he shrank from the risk attending the initiation of Prince Tchack-tchack (his heir), I do not know, but for some reason or other he put it off from time to time, till the prince in fact grew rather too old himself, and too cunning, and getting about with disreputable companions—that gross old villain Kauc, the crow, for one—it is just possible that some inkling of the hereditary mutilation in store for him was insinuated (for his own purposes) by that vile wretch.

"Still, most likely, even if he had known of it, he would have come in time to submit (so powerful a motive is ambition) rather than lose the crown, had not it happened that both he and Kapchack fell violently in love with the beautiful young jay, La Schach. Very naturally and very excusably, being so young and so beautiful, she was perhaps just a little capricious. Jealous to the last degree, old king Kapchack told her the secret, and that he really was not nearly so old as the world believed him to be—he was the sixth of the race, and not the original antiquity. No doubt the beauty laughed in her sleeve at him, and just for fun told Tchack-tchack all about it, and that she

would never marry a one-eyed bird. Kapchack, full of jealousy, bethought him that it was high time to destroy his heir's good looks, so he attempted to peck out his left eye in accordance with the usage of the house.

"But Tchack-tchack having now learnt the secret, vain of his beauty, and determined to have the lovely jay at any cost, was alive to the trick, and eluded his parent. This was the reason why Tchack-tchack towards the last would never go near the palace. Thus it happened that the hereditary practice was not resorted to, for poor old Kapchack VI. fell as you know, in the very hour of victory. Tchack-tchack, who has both eyes, and the most glossy tail, and a form of the manliest beauty, is now at this minute chattering all round the copse in a terrible rage, and quite beside himself, because nobody will vote for him to be king, especially since through the breaking of the bough the vaunted treasure is at last revealed and found to consist of a diamond locket and one silver spoon—a hollow business you see—so that he has no money, while the beautiful jay has just been united to our friend here—and goodness me, here she comes in a flutter!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW KING.

Up came the lovely young bride, full of news, and told them that the most extraordinary thing had just happened.

"Whatever is it, my love?" said her husband.

"Quick, whatever is it?" said the Squirrel.

"I can't wait," said Bevis.

"Nor I," said the Hare.

"Well," said the lovely creature—for whom an empire had been thrown away—"while the rook council was deliberating about the punishment to be awarded to Ah Kurroo, the legions, disgusted with the treatment they had received after so wonderful a victory, have risen in revolt, overthrown the government, driven the council away, taken the Khan from the tree where he was a prisoner, and proclaimed him Dictator!"

"Extraordinary!" said the Hare; "the rooks

always would have it that their's was the most perfect form of government ever known."

"No such rebellion was ever heard of before," said the Squirrel, "there is nothing like it in history; I know, for I've often slipped into the Owl's muniment room (between you and me) on the sly, and taken a peep at his ancient documents. It is most extraordinary!"

"I can't see it," said the Jay; "I don't agree with you; I am not in the least surprised. I always said they would never get on with so much caw-cawing and talking every evening; I always said——"

"Gentlemen," shouted the Woodpecker, rushing up breathless with haste, "I am sent round to tell you from the Dictator that you can now proceed to the election of a king without fear of any kind, for he will keep the enemy employed should they appear, and he will over-awe the two pretenders, Ki Ki and Kauc. Let every one say what he thinks without dread, and let there be no bribery and no intimidation. In the name of Ah Kurroo Khan!" and away he flew through the copse to make the proclamation.

Immediately afterwards the Owl, blundering in the daylight, came past and said that they had better

come on to his house, for he had just had a private interview with the Khan, and had orders to preside over this business. So Bevis and the Squirrel, the Hare, and the two Jays proceeded to the pollard tree; there was no need for Bevis to hide now, because he was recognised as a great friend of the Squirrel's, and the enemy of the Weasel. A noisy crowd had already collected, which was augmented every minute, and there was a good deal of rough pushing and loud talking, not unmingled with blows. They were all there (except the Weasel), the goldfinch, the tomtit, the chaffinch, the thrush, the blackbird, the missel-thrush, all of them, jays, the alien pigeons, doves, woodpeckers, the Rat, the Mouse, the Stoat, and the Fox.

As the crowd increased, so did the uproar, till the Owl appeared at the balcony of his mansion, and the Woodpecker called for silence. The Owl, when he could get a hearing, said they were all to give their opinions and say who they would have for their king. And that there might be less confusion he would call upon the least of them in size, and the youngest in age to speak first, and so on upwards to the oldest and biggest.

"I'm the least," cried the wren, coming forward

without a moment's delay, "and I think that, after all I have seen of the ins and outs of the world, I myself should make a very good king."

"Indeed you're not the smallest," said Te-te, the tomtit; "I am the smallest, besides which you are a smuggler. Now I, on the contrary, have already rendered great services to my country, and I am used to official life."

"Yes, you spy," cried Tchink, the chaffinch; and all the assembly hissed Te-te, till he was obliged to give way, as he could not make himself heard.

"Why not have a queen?" said the goldfinch. "I should think you have had enough of kings; now, why not have me for queen? I have the richest dress of all."

"Nothing of the kind," said the yellowhammer, "I wear cloth of gold myself."

"As for that," said the Woodpecker, "I myself have no little claim on the score of colour."

"But you have no such azure as me," said the kingfisher.

"Such gaudy hues are in the worst possible taste," said the blackbird, "and very vulgar. Now, if I were chosen——"

"Well," said the thrush, "well, I never heard anything equal to the blackbird's assurance; he who has never held the slightest appointment. Now my relation was ambassador"——

"I think," said the dove, "I should be able, if I held the position, to conciliate most parties, and make everything smooth."

"You're much too smooth for me," said Tchink. "It's my belief you're hand-in-glove with Choo Hoo, for all your tender ways—dear me!"

"If experience," said Cloctaw, "if experience is of any value on a throne, I think I myself"——

"Experience!" cried the Jay, in high disdain, "what is he talking of? Poor Cloctaw has gone past his prime; however, we must make allowance for his infirmities. You want some one with a decided opinion like myself, ladies and gentlemen!"

"If I might speak," began one of the alien wood-pigeons, but they shouted him down.

"I don't mean to be left out of this business, I can tell you," said the Mole, suddenly thrusting his snout up through the ground, "I consider I have been too much overlooked. But no election will be valid without my vote. Now, I can tell you that

there's not a fellow living who knows more than I do."

"Since the throne is vacant," said the Mouse, "why should not I be nominated?"

"I do not like the way things have been managed," said the Rat; "there were too many fine feathers at the court of the late king. Fur must have a turn now—if I am elected I shall make somebody who wears fur my prime minister." This was a bold bid for the support of all the four-footed creatures, and was not without its effect.

"I call that downright bribery," said the Jay.

"Listen to me a minute," said Sec, the stoat; but as they were now all talking together no one could address the assembly.

After a long time Bevis lost all patience, and held up his cannon-stick, and threatened to shoot the next one who spoke, which caused a hush.

"There's one thing *I* want to say," said Bevis, frowning, and looking very severe, as he stamped his foot. "I have made up my mind on one point. Whoever you have for king you shall not have the Weasel, for I will shoot him as dead as a nail the first time I see him."

"Hurrah!" cried everybody at once. "Hurrah for little Sir Bevis!"

"Now," said Bevis, "I see the Owl wants to speak, and as he's the only sensible one among you, just be quiet and hear what he's got to say."

At this the Owl, immensely delighted, made Sir Bevis a profound bow, and begged to observe that one thing seemed to have escaped the notice of the ladies and gentlemen whom he saw around him. It was true they were all of noble blood, and many of them could claim a descent through countless generations. But they had overlooked the fact that noble as they were, there was among them one with still higher claims; one who had royal blood in his veins, whose ancestors had been kings, and kings of high renown. He alluded to the Fox.

At this the Fox, who had not hitherto spoken, and kept rather in the background, modestly bent his head, and looked the other way.

"The Fox," cried Tchink, "impossible—he's nobody."

"Certainly not," said Te-te, "a mere nonentity."

"Quite out of the question," said the goldfinch.

"Out of the running," said the Hare.

"Absurd," said the Jay; and they all raised a clamour, protesting that even to mention the Fox was to waste the public time.

"I'm not so sure of that," muttered Cloctaw. "We might do worse; I should not object." But his remark was unheeded by all save the Fox, whose quick ear caught it.

Again there was a great clamour and uproar, and not a word could be heard, and again Bevis had to lift up his cannon-stick. Just then Ah Kurroo Khan sent a starling to know if they had finished, because Choo Hoo had quitted his camp, and his outposts were not a mile off.

"In that case," said the Owl, "our best course will be stop further discussion, and to put the matter to the test of the vote at once. (Hear, hear.) Do you then all stand off a good way, so that no one shall be afraid to do as he chooses, and then come to me one at a time, beginning with the wren (as she spoke first), and let each tell me who he or she votes for, and the reason why, and then I will announce the result."

So they all stood off a good way, except Sir Bevis, who came closer to the pollard to hear what

the voters said, and to see that all was done fairly. When all was ready the Owl beckoned to the wren, and the wren flew up and whispered; "I vote for the Fox because Te-te shall not have the crown."

Next came Te-te, and he said, "I vote for the Fox because the wren shall not have it."

Then Tchink, who said he voted for the Fox so that the goldfinch should not have the throne.

The goldfinch voted for the Fox that the yellow hammer should not have it, and the yellowhammer because the goldfinch should not succeed. The Jay did the same because Tchack-tchack should not have it; the dove because the pigeon should not have it: the blackbird to oust the thrush; and the thrush to stop the blackbird; the sparrow to stop the starling, and the starling to stop the sparrow; the Woodpecker to stop the kingfisher, and the kingfisher to stop the Woodpecker; and so on all through the list, all voting for the Fox in succession, to checkmate their friends' ambition, down to Cloctaw, who said he voted for the Fox because he knew he could not get the throne himself, and considered the Fox better than the others. Lastly, the Owl, seeing that Reynard had got the election (which indeed he had

anticipated when he called attention to the modest Fox) also voted for him.

Then he called the Fox forward, and was about to tell him that he was duly elected, and would sit on a throne firmly fixed upon the wide base of a universal plebiscite, when Eric, the missel-thrush (who had taken no part in the proceedings, for he alone regretted Kapchack), cried out that the Fox ought to be asked to show some proof of ability before he received the crown. This was so reasonable, that every one endorsed it; and the Missel-thrush, seeing that he had made an impression, determined to set the Fox the hardest task he could think of, and said that as it was the peculiar privilege of a monarch to protect his people, so the Fox, before he mounted the throne, ought to be called upon to devise some effectual means of repelling the onslaught of Choo Hoo.

"Hear, hear!" shouted the assembly, and cried with one voice upon the Fox to get them out of the difficulty, and save them from the barbarian horde.

The Fox was in the deepest bewilderment, but he carefully concealed his perplexity, and looked

down upon the ground as if pondering profoundly, whereas he really had not got the least idea what to do. There was silence. Every one waited for the Fox.

"Ahem!" said Cloctaw, as if clearing his throat.

The Fox detected his meaning, and slyly glanced towards him, when Cloctaw looked at Bevis and winked. Instantly, the Fox took the hint (afterwards claiming the idea as entirely his own), and lifting his head, said—

"Ladies and gentlemen, you have indeed set me a most difficult task—so difficult, that should I succeed in solving this problem, I hope shall obtain your complete confidence. Gentlemen, we have amongst us at this moment a visitor, and one whom we all delight to honour, the more especially as we know him to be the determined foe of that mercenary scoundrel the Weasel, who, should I be so fortunate as to obtain the crown shall, I promise you, never set foot in my palace—I allude to the friend of the Squirrel and the Hare—I allude to Sir Bevis. ('Hear, hear! Hurrah for little Sir Bevis! Three cheers more!') I see that you respond with enthusiasm to the sentiment I have

expressed. Well, our friend Sir Bevis can, I think, if we call upon him in a respectful and proper manner, help us out of this difficulty.

"He carries in his hand an instrument in which the ignition of certain chemical substances causes an alarming report, and projects a shower of formidable missiles to a distance. This instrument, which I hear he constructed himself, thereby displaying unparalleled ingenuity, he calls his cannon-stick. Now if we could persuade him to become our ally, and to bang off his cannon-stick when Choo Hoo comes, I think we should should soon see the enemy in full retreat, when the noble Dictator, Ah Kurroo Khan, could pursue, and add another to his already lengthy list of brilliant achievements. I would therefore propose, with the utmost humility, that Sir Bevis be asked to receive a deputation; and I would, with your permission, nominate the Hare, the Squirrel, and Cloctaw, as the three persons best able to convey your wishes."

At this address there was a general buzz of admiration; people whispered to each other that really the Fox was extraordinarily clever, and well worthy to ascend the throne—who would have

thought that any one so retiring could have suggested so original, and yet at the same time so practical a course? The Fox's idea was at once adopted. Bevis went back with the Jay to his seat on the moss under the oak, and there sat down to receive the deputation.

Just as it was about to set out, the Fox begged permission to say one word more, which being readily granted, he asked if he might send a message by the starling to Ah Kurroo Khan. The present, he said, seemed a most favourable moment for destroying those dangerous pretenders, Ki Ki and Kauc. Usually their brigand retainers were scattered all over the country, miles and miles apart, and while thus separated it would require an immense army —larger than the state in the present exhausted condition of the treasury could afford to pay without fresh taxes—to hunt the robbers down in their woods and fastnesses. But they were now concentrated, and preparing no doubt for a raid upon the copse.

Now if Ah Kurroo Khan were asked to fall upon them immediately, he could destroy them in the mass, and overthrow them without difficulty.

Might he send such a message to the Khan? The assembly applauded the Fox's foresight, and away flew the starling with the message. Ah Kurroo, only too delighted to have the opportunity of overthrowing his old enemy Kauc, and his hated rival Ki Ki, immediately gave the order to advance to his legions.

Meantime the deputation, consisting of the Hare, the Squirrel, and Cloctaw, waited upon Sir Bevis, who received them very courteously upon his seat of moss under the oak. He replied that he would shoot off his cannon-stick with the greatest pleasure, if they would show him in which direction they expected Choo Hoo to come. So the Hare, the Squirrel, and Cloctaw, with all the crowd following behind, took him to a gap in the hedge round the copse on the western side, and pointed out to him the way the enemy would come.

Indeed, Sir Bevis had hardly taken his stand and seen to the priming than the vanguard of the barbarians appeared over the tops of the trees. They were pushing on with all speed, for it seems that the outposts had reported to the emperor that there was a division in the copse, and that civil war had

broken out, being deceived by the attack delivered by Ah Kurroo upon the black pretender Kaue. Up then came the mighty host in such vast and threatening numbers that the sun was darkened as it had been on the day of the eclipse, and the crowd behind Sir Bevis, overwhelmed with fear, could scarce stand their ground. But Sir Bevis, not one whit daunted, dropped upon one knee, and levelling his cannon-stick upon the other, applied his match. The fire and smoke and sound of the report shook the confidence of the front ranks of the enemy; they paused and wheeled to right and left instead of advancing.

In a minute Bevis had his cannon-stick charged again, and bang it went. The second rank now turned and fell back and threw the host into confusion; still the vast numbers behind pushed blindly on. Bevis, in a state of excitement, now prepared for a grand effort. He filled his cannon with powder nearly to the muzzle, he rammed it down tight, and fearing lest it might kick and hurt him, he fixed his weapon on the stump of an elm which had been thrown some winters since, and whose fall had made the gap in the hedge. Then he cut a long

slender willow stick, slit it at one end, and inserted his match in the cleft. He could thus stand a long way back out of harm's way and ignite the priming. The report that followed was so loud the very woods rang again, the birds fluttered with fear, and even the Fox, bold as he was, shrank back from such a tremendous explosion.

Quite beside themselves with panic fear, the barbarian host turned and fled in utter confusion, nor could Choo Hoo, with all his efforts, rally them again, for having once suffered defeat in the battle of the eclipse, they had lost confidence. Ah Kurroo Khan, just as he had driven in the defenders and taken Kauc's camp (though Kauc himself, like the coward he was, escaped before the conflict began), saw the confusion and retreat of Choo Hoo's host, and without a moment's delay hurled his legions once more on the retiring barbarians. The greater number fled in every direction, each only trying to save himself; but the best of Choo Hoo's troops took refuge in their old camp.

Ah Kurroo Khan surrounded and invested the camp, but he hesitated to storm it, for he knew that it would entail heavy losses. He prepared to

blockade Choo Hoo with such strictness that he must eventually surrender from sheer hunger. He despatched a starling with a message, describing the course he had taken at once to the copse, and the starling, flying with great speed, arrived there in a few minutes. Meantime the assembly, delighted with the success which had attended Bevis's cannonading, crowded round and overwhelmed him with their thanks. Then when their excitement had somewhat abated, they remembered that the idea had emanated from the Fox, and it was resolved to proceed with his coronation at once. Just then the starling arrived from the Khan.

"Ah! yes," said Eric, the missel-thrush, who wanted Tchack-tchack to ascend the throne of his fathers, "it is true Choo Hoo is driven back and his camp surrounded. But do you bear in mind that Tu Kiu is not in it. He, they say, has gone into the west and has already collected a larger host than even Choo Hoo commanded, who are coming up as fast as they can to avenge the Battle of the Eclipse. You must also remember that Sir Bevis cannot be always here with his cannon-stick; he is not often here in the morning, and who can tell that some

day while he is away Tu Kiu may not appear, and while Choo Hoo makes a sortie and engages Ah Kurroo's attention, come on here and ravage the whole place, destroy all our stores, and leave us without a berry or an acorn! It seems to me that the Fox has only got us into a deeper trouble than ever, for if Choo Hoo or Tu Kiu ever does come down upon us, they will exact a still worse vengeance for the disgrace they have suffered. The Fox has only half succeeded; he must devise something more before he can claim our perfect confidence."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the assembly, "the Missel-thrush is right. The Fox must do something more!"

Now the Fox hated the Missel-thrush beyond all expression, for just as he was, as it seemed, about to grasp the object of his ambition, the Missel-thrush always suggested some new difficulty and delayed his triumph, but he suppressed his temper and said, "The Missel-thrush is a true patriot, and speaks with a view not to his own interest but to the good of his country. I myself fully admit the truth of his observations; Choo Hoo is indeed checked for a time, but there is no knowing how-

soon we may hear the shout of 'Koos-takke' again. Therefore, gentlemen, I would, with all humility, submit the following suggestion.

"There can be no doubt but that this invasion has gone on year after year, because the kingdom of Kapchack had become somewhat unwieldy with numerous annexations, and could not be adequately defended. This policy of annexation which the late government carried on for so long, bore, indeed, upon the surface the false glitter of glory. We heard of provinces and principalities added to the realm, and we forgot the cost. That policy has no doubt weakened the cohesive power of the kingdom: I need not pause here to explain to an audience of the calibre I see before me the difference between progress and expansion, between colonisation and violent, uncalled for, and unjust annexation.

"What I am now about to suggest will at once reduce taxation, fill our impoverished treasury, secure peace, and I believe impart a lasting stability to the state. It will enable us one and all to enjoy the fruits of the earth. I humbly propose that a treaty be made with Choo Hoo (Oh! oh! from the Missel-thrush and Tchack-tchack), that upon the payment of an

ample war indemnity (say a million nuts, two million acorns, and five million berries, or some trifling figure like that, not to be too exorbitant) he be permitted to withdraw (Shame! from Tchack-tchack), and that the provinces torn by force and fraud by the late government from their lawful owners, be restored to them ('Which means,' said the Missel-thrush, 'that as the lawful owners are not strong enough to protect themselves, Choo Hoo may plunder half the world as he likes'), and that peace be proclaimed. I, for my part, would far rather—if I be so fortunate as to be your king—I say I would far rather rule over a contented and prosperous people than over an empire in which the sword is never in the scabbard!"

"Hear, hear," shouted the assembly, "We have certainly selected the right person: this is truly wisdom. Let the treaty be concluded; and what a feast we will have upon the war indemnity," they said to one another.

"It is selling our honour—making a bargain and a market of our ancestors' courage," said the Missel-thrush.

"It is a vile infringement of my right," said

Tchack-tchack; "I am robbed of my inheritance, and the people of theirs, under a false pretext and sham. The country will be ruined."

"Begone," shouted the crowd, "Begone, you despicable wretches," and away flew the Missel-thrush and Tchack-tchack in utter disgust and despair.

So soon as they had gone the assembly proceeded to appoint a Commission to negociate the treaty of peace. It consisted of the Woodpecker, the Thrush, and Cloctaw: the Stoat muttered a good deal, for having been almost the only adherent of the Fox in his former lowly condition, he expected profitable employment now his friend had obtained such dignity. The Fox, however, called him aside and whispered something which satisfied him, and the Commission having received instructions proceeded at once to Ah Kurroo, who was to furnish them with a flag of truce. A company of starlings went with them to act as couriers and carry intelligence. When the Commission reached Ah Kurroo, he declined to open a truce with Choo Hoo, even for a moment, and presently, as the Commission solemnly demanded obedience in the name of the Fox, he decided to go himself to the king-elect and explain the reasons—

of a purely military character—which led him to place this obstruction in their way.

The Fox received Ah Kurroo with demonstrations of the deepest respect, congratulated him upon his achievements, and admired the disposition he had made of his forces so as to completely blockade the enemy. Ah Kurroo, much pleased with this reception, and the appreciation of his services, pointed out that Choo Hoo was now so entirely in his power, that in a few days he would have to surrender, as provisions were failing him. Long ere Tu Kiu could return with the relieving column the emperor would be a captive. Ah Kurroo begged the Fox not to throw away this glorious opportunity.

The king-elect, who had his own reasons for not desiring the Khan to appear too victorious, listened attentively, but pointed out that it was not so much himself, but the nation which demanded instant peace.

"Moreover," said he in a whisper to the Khan, "don't you see, my dear general, that if you totally destroy Choo Hoo your occupation will be gone; we shall not require an army or a general. Now as it is my intention to appoint you commander-in-chief for life ——"

"Say no more," said Ah Kurroo, "say no more;" then aloud, "Your royal highness' commands shall be immediately obeyed;" and away he flew, and gave the Commission the flag of truce.

Choo Hoo, confined in his camp with a murmuring and mutinous soldiery, short of provisions, and expecting every moment to see the enemy pouring into his midst, was beyond measure delighted when he heard that peace was proposed, indeed he could scarcely believe that any one in his senses could offer such a thing to an army which must inevitably surrender in a few hours. But when he heard that the Fox was the king-elect, he began to comprehend, for there were not wanting suspicions that it was the Fox who, when Choo Hoo was only a nameless adventurer, assisted him with advice.

The Commission, therefore, found their task easy enough so far as the main point was concerned, that there should be peace, but when they came to discuss the conditions it became a different matter. The Fox, a born diplomat, had instructed them to put forward the hardest conditions first, and if they could not force these upon Choo Hoo to gradually slacken them, little by little, till they overcame his reluctance.

At every step they sent couriers to the king-elect with precise information of their progress.

The negociations lasted a very long time, quite an hour, during which the couriers flew incessantly to and fro, and Bevis, lying on his back on the moss under the oak, tried which could screech the loudest, himself or the Jay. Bevis would easily have won had he been able to resist the inclination to pull the Jay's tail, which made the latter set up such a yell that everybody started, Bevis shouted with laughter, and even the Fox lost his gravity.

Choo Hoo agreed to everything without much difficulty, except the indemnity; he drew back at that, declaring it was too many millions, and there was even some danger of the negociations being broken off. But the Fox was equally firm, he insisted on it, and even added 10,000 bushels of grain to the original demand, at which Choo Hoo nearly choked with indignation. The object of the Fox in requiring the grain was to secure the faithful allegiance of all his lesser subjects, as the sparrows, and indeed he regarded the indemnity as the most certain means of beginning his reign at the height of popularity, since it would be distributed among

the nation. People could not, moreover, fail to remark the extreme disinterestedness of the king, since of all these millions of berries, acorns, nuts, grain, and so forth, there was not one single mouthful for himself. Choo Hoo, as said before, full of indignation, abruptly turned away from the Commission, and, at a loss what to do, they communicated with the Fox.

He ordered them to inform Choo Hoo that under certain restrictions travellers would in future be permitted access to the spring in the copse which did not freeze in winter. The besieged emperor somewhat relaxed the austerity of his demeanour at this; another pourparler took place, in the midst of which the Fox told the Commission to mention (as if casually) that among others there would be a clause restoring independence to all those princes and archdukes whose domains the late Kapchack had annexed. Choo Hoo could scarce maintain decorum when he heard this; he could have shouted with delight, for he saw in a moment that it was equivalent to ceding half Kapchack's kingdom, since these small Powers would never be able to defend themselves against his hosts.

At the same moment, too, he was called aside, and informed that a private messenger had arrived from the Fox: it was the Humble-bee, who had slipped easily through the lines and conveyed a strong hint from the king-elect. The Fox said he had done the best he could for his brother, the emperor, remembering their former acquaintance; now let the emperor do his part, and between them they could rule the earth with ease. Choo Hoo having told the Humble-bee that he quite understood, and that he agreed to the Fox's offer, dismissed him, and returned to the Commission, whose labours were now coming to a close.

All the clauses having been agreed to, Ess, the Owl, as the most practised in such matters, was appointed by the Fox to draw up the document in proper form for signature. While this was being done, the king-elect proceeded to appoint his Cabinet: Sec, the Stoat, was nominated Treasurer; Ah Kurroo Khan, commander-in-chief for life; Ess, the Owl, continued chief secretary of state; Cloctaw was to be grand chamberlain; Raoul, the Rat, lieutenant-governor of the coast (along the brook and Longpond), and so on.

Next the Weasel, having failed to present himself when summoned by the Woodpecker, was attainted as

contumacious, and sentenced, with the entire approval of the assembly, to lose all his dignities and estates; his woods, parks, forests, and all his property were escheated to the Crown, and were by the king handed over to his faithful follower Sec. The Weasel (whose whereabouts could not be discovered) was also proclaimed an outlaw, whom any one might slay without fear of trial. It was then announced that all others who absented themselves from the court, and were not present when the treaty was signed, would be treated as traitors, and receive the same punishment as the Weasel.

Immediately he heard this, Yiwy, son and heir of Ki Ki, the hawk, who had fled, came and paid homage to the Fox, first to save the estates from confiscation, and secondly that he might enjoy them in his father's place. Ki Ki was accordingly declared an outlaw. Directly afterwards, Kauc, the crow, crept in, much crestfallen, and craved pardon, hoping to save his property. The assembly received him with hisses and hoots: still the Fox kept his word, and permitted him to retain his estates upon payment of an indemnity for the cost of the troops employed against him under Ah Kurroo, of 100,000 acorns. Kauc protested that

he should be ruined: but the crowd would not hear him, and he was obliged to submit.

Then Eric, the Missel-thrush, and Prince Tchack-tchack flew up: the prince had yielded to good advice, and resolved to smother his resentment in order to enjoy the immense private domains of his late parent. The proctocols were now ready, and the Fox had already taken the document to sign, when there was a rush of wings, and in came six or seven of those princes and archdukes—among them the archduke of the Peewits—to whom independence was to be restored. They loudly proclaimed their loyalty, and begged not to be cast off: declaring that they were quite unable to defend themselves, and should be mercilessly plundered by the barbarian horde. The Fox lifted his paw in amazement that there should exist on the face of the earth any such poltroons as this, who preferred to pay tribute and enjoy peace rather than endure the labour of defending their own independence. The whole assembly cried shame upon them, but the princes persisted, and filled the court with their lamentations, till at a sign from the king they were hustled out of the copse.

The treaty itself filled so many pages of parchment that no one attempted to read it, the Owl certifying that it was all correct: an extract, however, divested of technical expressions, was handed about the court, and was to the following effect:—

"The Treaty of Windflower Copse.

"1. The high contracting parties to this treaty are and shall be, on the one side, king Reynard CI., and on the other side, Choo Hoo, the emperor.

"2. It is declared that Kapchack being dead honour is satisfied, and further fighting superfluous.

"3. Choo Hoo agrees to pay a war indemnity of one million nuts, two million acorns, five million berries, and ten thousand bushels of grain, in ten equal instalments, the first instalment the day of the full moon next before Christmas, and the remainder at intervals of a fortnight.

4. The spring in the copse, which does not freeze in winter, is declared free and open to all travellers, not exceeding fifty in number.

5. The copse itself is hereby declared a neutral zone, wherein all councils, pourparlers, parliaments, commissions, markets, fairs, meetings, courts of justice,

and one and all and every such assembly for public or private purposes, may be and shall be held, without let or hindrance, saving only :—(*a*) Plots against His Majesty king Reynard CI.; (*b*) plots against His Imperial Majesty Choo Hoo.

6. The unjust annexations of the late king Kapchack are hereby repudiated, and all the provinces declared independent.

7. Lastly, peace is proclaimed for ever and a day, beginning to-morrow. (Signed)

His Majesty King Reynard CI.

His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Choo Hoo.

B. (for Sir Bevis).

Sec, the Stoat (Treasurer).

Ah Kurroo Khan (Commander-in-Chief).

Ess, the Owl (Chief Secretary of State).

Cloctaw, the Jackdaw (Grand Chamberlain).

Raoul, the Rat (Lieutenant-Governor of the Coasts.)

Phu, the Starling.

Tchink, the Chaffinch.

Te-te, the Tomtit.

Ulu, the Hare.

Eric, the Missel-thrush.

Tchack-tchack, the Magpie, &c., &c., &c.

Every one in fact signed it but the Weasel, who was still lying sullenly perdue. The B was for Bevis; the Fox, who excelled in the art of paying delicate compliments, insisted upon Bevis signing next to the high contracting parties. So taking the quill, Bevis printed a good big B, a little staggering, but plain and legible. Directly this business was concluded, Ah Kurroo withdrew his legions; Choo Hoo sallied forth from the camp, and returning the way he had come, in about an hour was met by his son Tu Kiu at the head of enormous reinforcements. Delighted at the treaty, and the impunity they now enjoyed, the vast barbarian horde, divided into foraging parties of from one hundred to a thousand, spread over a tract of country thirty miles wide, rolled like a devastating tidal wave in resistless course southwards, driving the independent princes before them, plundering, ravaging, and destroying, and leaving famine behind. Part of the plunder indeed, of the provinces recently attached to Kapchack's kingdom, and now declared independent, furnished the first instalment of the war indemnity the barbarians had engaged to pay.

Meantime, in the copse, preparations were made for the coronation of the king, who had assumed, in

accordance with well-known precedents, that all his ancestors, whether acknowledged or not, had reigned, and called himself king Reynard the Hundred and First. The procession having been formed, and all the ceremonies completed, Bevis banged off his cannon-stick as a salute, and the Fox, taking the crown, proceeded to put it on his head, remarking as he did so that thus they might see how when rogues fall out honest folk come by their own.

CHAPTER IX.

SIR BEVIS AND THE WIND.

SOME two or three days after peace was concluded, it happened that one morning the waggon was going up on the hills to bring down a load of straw, purchased from the very old gentleman who in his anger, shot king Kapchack. When Bevis saw the horses brought out of the stable, and learnt that they were to travel along the road that led towards the ships (though but three miles out of the sixty) nothing would do but he must go with them. As his papa and the Bailiff were on this particular occasion to accompany the waggon, Bevis had his own way as usual.

The road passed not far from the copse, and Bevis heard the Woodpecker say something, but he was too busy touching up the horses with the carter's long whip to pay any heed. If he had been permitted he would have lashed them into a sharp trot. Every now and then Bevis turned round to give the Bailiff a sly flick

with the whip; the Bailiff sat at the tail and dangled his legs over behind, so that his broad back was a capital thing to hit. By-and-by, the carter left the highway and took the waggon along a lane where the ruts were white with chalk, and which wound round at the foot of the downs. Then after surmounting a steep hill, where the lane had worn a deep hollow, they found a plain with hills all round it, and here, close to the sward, was the straw-rick from which they were to load.

Bevis insisted upon building the load, that is putting the straw in its place when it was thrown up; but in three minutes he said he hated it, it was so hot and scratchy, so out he jumped. Then he ran a little way up the green sward of the hill, and lying down rolled over and over to the bottom. Next he wandered along the low hedge dividing the stubble from the sward, so low that he could jump over it, but as he could not find anything he came back, and at last so teased and worried his papa to let him go up to the top of the hill, that he consented, on Bevis promising in the most solemn manner that he would not go one single inch beyond the summit, where there was an ancient earthwork. Bevis promised,

and his eyes looked so clear and truthful, and his cheek so rosy and innocent, and his lips so red and pouting that no one could choose but believe him.

Away he ran thirty yards up the hill at a burst, but it soon became so steep he had to stay and climb slowly. Five minutes afterwards he began to find it very hard work indeed, though it looked so easy from below, and stopped to rest. He turned round and looked down; he could see over the waggon and the straw-rick, over the ash trees in the hedges, over the plain (all yellow with stubble) across to the hills on the other side, and there, through a gap in them, it seemed as if the land suddenly ceased, or dropped down, and beyond was a dark blue expanse which ended in the sky where the sky came down to touch it.

By his feet was a rounded boulder-stone, brown and smooth, a hard sarsen; this he tried to move, but it was so heavy that he could but just stir it. But the more difficult a thing was, or the more he was resisted, the more determined Bevis always became. He would stamp and shout with rage, rather than let a thing alone quietly. When he did this sometimes Pan, the spaniel, would look at

him in amazement, and wonder why he did not leave it and go on and do something else, as the world was so big, and there were very many easy things that could be done without any trouble. That was not Bevis's idea, however, at all: he never quitted a thing till he had done it. And so he tugged and strained and struggled with the stone till he got it out of its bed and on the sloping sward.

Then he pushed and heaved at it, till it began to roll, and giving it a final thrust with his foot, away it went, at first rumbling and rolling slowly, and then faster and with a thumping, till presently it bounded and leaped ten yards at a time, and at the bottom of the hill sprang over the hedge like a hunter, and did not stop till it had gone twenty yards out into the stubble towards the straw-rick. Bevis laughed and shouted, though a little disappointed that it had not smashed the waggon, or at least jumped over it. Then, waving his hat, away he went again, now picking up a flint to fling as far down as he could, now kicking over a white round puff ball—always up, up, till he grew hot, and his breath came in quick deep pants.

But still as determined as ever, he pushed on, and presently stood on the summit, on the edge of the fosse. He looked down; the waggon seemed under his feet; the plain, the hills beyond, the blue distant valley on one side, on the other the ridge he had mounted stretched away, and beyond it still more ridges, till he could see no further. He went into the fosse, and there it seemed so pleasant that he sat down, and in a minute lay extended at full length in his favourite position, looking up at the sky. It was much more blue than he had ever seen it before, and it seemed only just over his head; the grasshoppers called in the grass at his side, and he could hear a lark sing, singing far away, but on a level with him. First he thought he would talk to the grasshopper, or call to one of the swallows, but he had now got over the effort of climbing, and he could not sit still.

Up he jumped, ran up the rampart, and then down again into the fosse. He liked the trench best, and ran along it in the hollow, picking up stray flints and throwing them as far as he could. The trench wound round the hill, and presently

when he saw a low hawthorn-bush just outside the broad green ditch, and scrambled up to it, the waggon was gone and the plain, for he had reached the other side of the camp. There the top of the hill was level and broad: a beautiful place for a walk.

Bevis went a little way out upon it, and the turf was so soft, and seemed to push up his foot so, that he must go on, and when he had got a little farther, he heard another grasshopper, and thought he would run and catch him; but the grasshopper, who had heard of his tricks, stopped singing, and hid in a bunch, so that Bevis could not see him.

Next he saw a little round hill—a curious little hill—not very much higher than his own head, green with grass and smooth. This curious little hill greatly pleased him; he would have liked to have had it carried down into his garden at home; he ran up on the top of it, and shouted at the sun, and danced round on the tumulus. A third grasshopper called in the grass, and Bevis ran down after him, but he, too, was too cunning; then a glossy ball of thistledown came up so silently, Bevis did not see it

till it touched him, and lingered a moment lovingly against his shoulder. Before he could grasp it, it was gone.

A few steps farther and he found a track crossing the hill, waggon-ruts in the turf, and ran along it a little way—only a little way, for he did not care for anything straight. Next he saw a mushroom, and gathered it, and while hunting about hither and thither for another, came upon some boulder-stones, like the one he had hurled down the slope, but very much larger, big enough to play hide-and-seek behind. He danced round these — Bevis could not walk—and after he had danced round every one, and peered under and climbed over one or two, he discovered that they were put in a circle.

"Somebody's been at play here," thought Bevis, and looking round to see who had been placing the stones in a ring, he saw a flock of rooks far off in the air, even higher up than he was on the hill, wheeling about, soaring round with outspread wings and cawing. They slipped past each other in and out, tracing a maze, and rose up, drifting away slowly as they rose; they were so happy, they danced in the sky. Bevis ran along the hill in the same direction they

were going, shouting and waving his hand to them, and they cawed to him in return.

When he looked to see where he was he was now in the midst of long mounds or heaps of flints that had been dug and stacked; he jumped on them, and off again, picked up the best for throwing, and flung them as far as he could. There was a fir-copse but a little distance farther, he went to it, but the trees grew so close together he could not go through, so he walked round it, and then the ground declined so gently he did not notice he was going down hill. At the bottom there was a wood of the strangest old twisted oaks he had ever seen; not the least like the oak trees by his house at home that he knew so well.

These were short, and so very knotty that even the trunks, thick as they were, seemed all knots, and the limbs were gnarled, and shaggy with grey lichen. He threw pieces of dead stick, which he found on the ground, up at the acorns, but they were not yet ripe, so he wandered on among the oaks, tapping every one he passed to see which was hollow, till presently he had gone so far he could not see the hills for the boughs.

But just as he was thinking he would ask a bee to show him the way out (for there was not a single bird in the wood), he came to a place where the oaks were thinner, and the space between them was covered with bramble-bushes. Some of the blackberries were ripe, and his lips were soon stained with their juice. Passing on from bramble-thicket to bramble-thicket, by-and-by he shouted, and danced, and clapped his hands with joy, for there were some nuts on a hazel bough, and they were ripe he was sure, for the side towards the sun was rosy. He knew that nuts do not get brown first, but often turn red towards the south. Out came his pocket-knife, and with seven tremendous slashes, for Bevis could not do anything steadily, off came a branch with a crook. He crooked down the bough and gathered the nuts, there were eight on that bough, and on the next four, and on the next only two. But there was another stole beyond, from which, in a minute, he had twenty more, and then as he could not stay to crack them, he crammed them into his pocket and ceased to reckon.

"I will take fifty up to the Squirrel," he said to himself, "and the nut-crackers, and show him how

to do it properly with some salt." So he tugged at the boughs, and dragged them down, and went on from stole to stole till he had roamed into the depths of the nut-tree wood.

Then, as he stopped a second to step over a little streamlet that oozed along at his feet, all at once he became aware how still it was. No birds sang, and no jay called; no woodpecker chuckled; there was not even a robin; nor had he seen a rabbit, or a squirrel, or a dragon-fly, or any of his friends. Already the outer rim of some of the hazel leaves was brown, while the centre of the leaf remained green, but there was not even the rustle of a leaf as it fell. The larks were not here, nor the swallows, nor the rooks; the streamlet at his feet went on without a murmur; and the breeze did not come down into the hollow. Except for a bee, whose buzz seemed quite loud as he flew by, there was not a moving thing. Bevis was alone; he had never before been so utterly alone, and he stopped humming the old tune the Brook had taught him, to listen.

He lifted his crook and struck the water; it splashed, but in a second it was still again. He

flung a dead branch into a tree, it cracked as it hit a bough, on which the leaves rustled; then it fell thump, and lay still and quiet. He stamped on the ground, the grass gave no sound. He shouted holloa! but there was no echo. His voice seemed to slip away from him, he could not shout so loud as he had been accustomed to. For a minute he liked it; then he began to think it was not so pleasant; then he wanted to get out, but he could not see the hill, so he did not know which way to go.

So he stroked a knotted oak with his hand, smoothing it down, and said, "Oak, oak, tell me which way to go?" and the oak tried to speak, but there was no wind, and he could not, but he dropped just one leaf on the right side, and Bevis picked it up, and as he did so, a nut-tree bough brushed his cheek.

He kissed the bough, and said, "Nut-tree bough, nut-tree bough, tell me the way to go." The bough could not speak for the same reason that the oak could not; but it bent down towards the streamlet. Bevis dropped on one knee and lifted up a little water in the hollow of his hand, and drank it, and asked which way to go.

The stream could not speak because there was no stone to splash against, but it sparkled in the sunshine (as Bevis had pushed the bough aside), and looked so pleasant that he followed it a little way, and then he came to an open place with twisted old oaks, gnarled and knotted, where a blue butterfly was playing.

"Show me the way out, you beautiful creature," said Bevis.

"So I will, Bevis dear," said the butterfly. "I have just come from your waggon, and your papa and the Bailiff have been calling to you, and I think they will soon be coming to look for you. Follow me, my darling."

So Bevis followed the little blue butterfly, who danced along as straight as it was possible for him to go, for he, like Bevis, did not like too much straightness. Now the oak knew the butterfly was there, and that was why he dropped his leaf; and so did the nut-tree bough, and that was why he drooped and let the sun sparkle on the water, and the stream smiled to make Bevis follow him to where the butterfly was playing. Without pausing anywhere, but just zig-zagging on, the blue butterfly floated before Bevis, who danced after him,

the nuts falling from his crammed pockets; knocking every oak as he went with his stick, asking them if they knew anything, or had anything to tell the people in the copse near his house. The oaks were bursting with things to tell him, and messages to send, but they could not speak, as there was no breeze in the hollow. He whipped the bramble bushes with his crook, but they did not mind in the least, they were so glad to see him.

He whistled to the butterfly to stop a moment while he picked a blackberry; the butterfly settled on a leaf. Then away they went again together till they left the wood behind and began to go up the hill. There the butterfly grew restless, and could scarce restrain his pace for Bevis to keep up, as they were now in the sunshine. Bevis raced after as fast as he could go up hill, but at the top the butterfly thought he saw a friend of his, and telling Bevis that somebody would come to him in a minute, away he flew. Bevis looked round, but it was all strange and new to him; there were hills all round, but there was no waggon, and no old trench or rampart; nothing but the blue sky and the great sun, which did not seem far off.

While he wondered which way to go, the Wind came along the ridge, and taking him softly by the ear pushed him gently forward and said, "Bevis, my love, I have been waiting for you ever so long; why did you not come before?"

"Because you never asked me," said Bevis.

"Oh yes, I did; I asked you twenty times in the copse. I beckoned to you out of the great oak, under which you went to sleep; and I whispered to you from the fir trees where the Squirrel played, but you were so busy, dear, so busy with Kapchack, and the war, and Choo Hoo, and the court and all the turmoil, that you did not hear me."

"You should have called louder," said Bevis.

"So I did," said the Wind. "Don't you remember I whirled the little bough against your window, and rattled the casement that night you saw the Owl go by."

"I was so sleepy," said Bevis, "I did not know what you meant; you should have kissed me."

"So I did," said the Wind. "I kissed you a hundred times out in the field, and stroked your hair, but you would not take any notice."

"I had so much to do," said Bevis; "there was the Weasel and my cannon-stick."

"But I wanted you very much," said the Wind, "because I love you, and longed for you to come and visit me."

"Well, now I am come," said Bevis. "But where do you live?"

"This is where I live, dear," said the Wind. "I live upon the hill; sometimes I go to the sea, and sometimes to the woods, and sometimes I run through the valley, but I always come back here, and you may always be sure of finding me here; and I want you to come and romp with me."

"I will come," said Bevis; "I like a romp, but are you very rough?"

"Oh no, dear; not with you."

"I am a great big boy," said Bevis; "I am eating my peck of salt very fast: I shall soon get too big to romp with you. How old are you, you jolly Wind?"

The Wind laughed and said, "I am older than all the very old things. I am as old as the Brook."

"But the Brook is very old," said Bevis. "He

told me he was older than the hills, so I do not think you are as old as he is."

"Yes I am," said the Wind; "he was always my playfellow; we were children together."

"If you are so very, very old," said Bevis, "it is no use your trying to romp with me, because I am very strong; I can carry my papa's gun on my shoulder, and I can run very fast; do you know the stupid old Bailiff can't catch me. I can go round the ricks ever so much quicker than he can."

"I can run quick," said the Wind.

"But not so quick as me," said Bevis; "now see if you can catch me."

Away he ran, and for a moment he left the Wind behind; but the Wind blew a little faster, and overtook him, and they raced along together, like two wild things, till Bevis began to pant. Then down he sat on the turf and kicked up his heels and shouted, and the Wind fanned his cheek and cooled him, and kissed his lips and stroked his hair, and caressed him and played with him, till up he jumped again and danced along, the Wind always pushing him gently.

"You are a jolly old Wind," said Bevis, "I

like you very much; but you must tell me a story, else we shall quarrel. I'm sure we shall."

"I will try," said the Wind; "but I have forgotten all my stories, because the people never come to listen to me now."

"Why don't they come?" said Bevis.

"They are too busy," said the Wind, sighing; "they are so very, very busy, just like you were with Kapchack and his treasure and the war, and all the rest of the business; they have so much to do, they have quite forsaken me."

"I will come to you," said Bevis; "do not be sorry. I will come and play with you."

"Yes, do," said the Wind; "and drink me, dear, as much as ever you can. I shall make you strong. Now drink me."

Bevis stood still and drew in a long, long breath, drinking the Wind till his chest was full and his heart beat quicker. Then he jumped and danced and shouted.

"There," said the Wind, "See, how jolly I have made you. It was I who made you dance and sing, and run along the hill just now. Come up here, my darling Sir Bevis, and drink me as often as

ever you can, and the more you drink of me the happier you will be, and the longer you will live. And people will look at you and say, 'How jolly he looks? Is he not nice? I wish I was like him.' And presently they will say, 'Where does he learn all these things?'

"For you must know, Bevis my dear, that although I have forgotten my stories, yet they are all still there in my mind, and by-and-by, if you keep on drinking me I shall tell you all of them, and nobody will know how you learnt it all. For I know more than the Brook, because you see, I travel about everywhere: and I know more than the trees, indeed, all they know I taught them myself. The sun is always telling me everything, and the stars whisper to me at night: the ocean roars at me: the earth whispers to me: just you lie down, Bevis love, upon the ground and listen."

So Bevis lay down on the grass, and heard the Wind whispering in the tufts and bunches, and the Earth under him answered, and asked the Wind to stay and talk. But the Wind said, "I have got Bevis to-day: come on, Bevis," and Bevis stood up and walked along.

"Besides all these things," said the Wind, "I can remember everything that ever was. There never was anything that I cannot remember, and my mind is so clear that if you will but come up here and drink me, you will understand everything."

"Well then," said Bevis, "I will drink you—there, I have just had such a lot of you: now tell me this instant why the sun is up there, and is he very hot if you touch him, and which way does he go when he sinks beyond the wood, and who lives up there, and are they nice people, and who painted the sky?"

The Wind laughed aloud, and said, "Bevis my darling, you have not drunk half enough of me yet, else you would never ask such silly questions as that. Why those are like the silly questions the people ask who live in the houses of the cities, and never feel me or taste me, or speak to me. And I have seen them looking through long tubes——"

"I know," said Bevis; "they are telescopes, and you look at the sun and the stars, and they tell you all about them."

"Pooh!" said the Wind, "don't you believe such stuff and rubbish, my pet. How can they

know anything about the sun who are never out in the sunshine, and never come up on the hills, or go into the woods? How can they know anything about the stars who never stopped on the hills, or on the sea all night? How can they know anything of such things who are shut up in houses, dear, where I cannot come in?

"Bevis, my love, if you want to know all about the sun, and the stars, and everything, make haste and come to me, and I will tell you, dear. In the morning, dear, get up as quick as you can, and drink me as I come down from the hill. In the day go up on the hill, dear, and drink me again, and stay there if you can till the stars shine out, and drink still more of me.

"And by-and-by you will understand all about the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the Earth which is so beautiful, Bevis. It is so beautiful, you can hardly believe how beautiful it is. Do not listen, dear, not for one moment, to the stuff and rubbish they tell you down there in the houses where they will not let me come. If they say the Earth is not beautiful, tell them they do not speak the truth. But it is not their fault, for they have

never seen it, and as they have never drank me their eyes are closed, and their ears shut up tight. But every evening, dear, before you get into bed, do you go to your window—the same as you did the evening the Owl went by — and lift the curtain and look up at the sky, and I shall be somewhere about, or else I shall be quiet in order that there may be no clouds, so that you may see the stars. In the morning, as I said before, rush out and drink me up.

"The more you drink of me, the more you will want, and the more I shall love you. Come up to me upon the hills, and your heart will never be heavy, but your eyes will be bright, and your step quick, and you will sing and shout ——"

"So I will," said Bevis, "I will shout. Holloa!" and he ran up on to the top of the little round hill, to which they had now returned, and danced about on it as wild as could be.

"Dance away, dear," said the Wind, much delighted, "Everybody dances who drinks me. The man in the hill there ——"

"What man?" said Bevis, "and how did he get in the hill; just tell him I want to speak to him."

"Darling," said the Wind, very quiet and softly, "he is dead, and he is in the little hill you are standing on, under your feet. At least, he was there once, but there is nothing of him there now. Still it is his place, and as he loved me, and I loved him, I come very often and sing here."

"When did he die?" said Bevis, "Did I ever see him?"

"He died just about a minute ago, dear; just before you came up the hill. If you were to ask the people who live in the houses, where they will not let me in (they carefully shut out the sun too) they would tell you he died thousands of years ago; but they are foolish, very foolish. It was hardly so long ago as yesterday. Did not the Brook tell you all about that?

"Now this man, and all his people, used to love me and drink me, as much as ever they could all day long and a great part of the night, and when they died they still wanted to be with me, and so they were all buried on the tops of the hills, and you will find these curious little mounds everywhere on the ridges, dear, where I blow along. There I come to them still, and sing through the long dry grass,

and rush over the turf, and I bring the scent of the clover from the plain, and the bees come humming along upon me. The sun comes too, and the rain. But I am here most; the sun only shines by day, and the rain only comes now and then.

"But I am always here, day and night, winter and summer. Drink me as much as you will, you cannot drink me away; there is always just as much of me left. As I told you, the people who were buried in these little mounds used to drink me, and oh! how they raced along the turf, dear, there is nobody can run so fast now; and they leaped and danced, and sang and shouted. I loved them as I love you, my darling; there sit down and rest on the thyme, dear, and I will stroke your hair and sing to you."

So Bevis sat down on the thyme, and the Wind began to sing, so low and sweet and so strange an old song, that he closed his eyes and leaned on his arm on the turf. There were no words to the song, but Bevis understood it all, and it made him feel so happy. The great sun smiled upon him, the great Earth bore him in her arms gently, the Wind caressed him, singing all the while. Now Bevis

knew what the Wind meant; he felt with his soul out to the far distant sun just as easily as he could feel with his hand to the bunch of grass beside him; he felt with his soul down through into the Earth just as easily as he could touch the sward with his fingers. Something seemed to come to him out of the sunshine and the grass.

"There never was a yesterday," whispered the Wind presently, "and there never will be to-morrow. It is all one long to-day. When the man in the hill was you were too, and he still is now you are here; but of these things you will know more when you are older, that is if you will only continue to drink me. Come, dear, let us race on again." So the two went on and came to a hawthorn bush, and Bevis, full of mischief always, tried to slip away from the Wind round the bush, but the Wind laughed and caught him.

A little further and they came to the fosse of the old camp. Bevis went down into the trench, and he and the Wind raced round along it as fast as ever they could go, till presently he ran up out of it on the hill, and there was the waggon underneath him, with the load well piled up now. There was the

plain, yellow with stubble; the hills beyond it and the blue valley, just the same as he had left it.

As Bevis stood and looked down, the Wind caressed him and said, "Good-bye, darling, I am going yonder, straight across to the blue valley and the blue sky, where they meet; but I shall be back again when you come next time. Now remember, my dear, to drink me—come up here and drink me."

"Shall you be here?" said Bevis, "are you quite sure you will be here?"

"Yes," said the Wind, "I shall be quite certain to be here; I promise you, love, I will never go quite away. Promise me faithfully, too, that you will come up and drink me, and shout and race and be happy."

"I promise," said Bevis, beginning to go down the hill; "good-bye, jolly old Wind."

"Good-bye, dearest," whispered the Wind, as he went across out towards the valley. As Bevis went down the hill, a blue harebell, who had been singing farewell to summer all the morning, called to him and asked him to gather her and carry her home, as she would rather go with him than stay now autumn was near.

Bevis gathered the harebell, and ran with the flower in his hand down the hill, and as he ran the wild thyme kissed his feet and said "Come again, Bevis, come again." At the bottom of the hill the waggon was loaded now; so they lifted him up, and he rode home on the broad back of the leader.

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